

COMMANDO BOOKS

BAR SINISTER

By

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BAR SINISTER

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CHAPTER I

I WISH to make it quite clear that it was neither gold nor game that attracted me to the Golcooda hill tracts. At one time this area had been a big game hunter's paradise but had fallen into disrepute during the last two decades as a result of the phenomenal number of deaths from man-eating tigers.

The average man-eater is a tough and cunning brute but from all accounts the Golcooda specimens were fiends incarnate and had been responsible for a whole series of ghastly incidents.

I have spent most of my life in quest of big game and long before these events took place I had had a vague suspicion that there was more going on there than met the eye.

I have shot many man-eaters and learn to treat them with considerable respect, but, even so, I have never heard of one in any other part of India that was not finally brought to book. Yet here was a large tract of hill country given over to what can only be described as a veritable reign of terror.

The latest victims were two American girls who had disappeared without leaving any trace whatsoever; not only were the girls missing but the entire party of Shikaris and porters had failed to return. The Police had tried to trace them without success and it was the generally accepted theory that the girls must have fallen

BAR SINISTER

victims to a tiger and that the staff had decided to make a bolt with the loot; this would have been considerable as they were very well equipped and expense had been no object when they were fitting out the expedition.

I knew them both and I am afraid I was partly responsible for their ill-fated trip to India. Barbara Eve was the daughter of a millionaire and her friend, Joan Stainforth, I had known, and loved, for years. We were engaged once but somehow drifted apart as I was badly bitten with the wander lust in those days and we failed to agree on the subject of settling down. She was a small person with tawny hair and hazel eyes and the most perfect figure I have ever seen.

We remained the best of friends and I stayed with her parents on my last trip to America. They gave a dance in my honour the night before I sailed and I told her that I was giving up the wilds and would she accept me? She would not and I did not blame her! I should have taken my chance before and now that I had had my fill of the life I wanted, it was too late. Or was it?

"Is this really the end? I asked.

"Of course it is darling", she replied. But I did not believe her and swore that I would ask again.

I had not expected to see them arrive in India a few months later and was laid up after a riding accident while they were fixing up details of their trip. Joan came to see me several times in hospital, and I did my best to persuade them to change their plans.

Some idiot had mentioned Golcooda to them, a fatal thing to do before Barbara Eve, who is generally in the news and invariably the first woman to be doing something or other. She had almost started an "international incident" in Arabia, which delighted the press but caused endless trouble for already over-worked British officials. I forget the details but it was something to do with a Bedouin raid, and someone was shot.

I hated to think of Joan in her company as Barbara collected trouble like a pi-dog collects fleas. Even so, I had heard that she was a capable person and a magnificent shot and I did not envy anyone who tried to get the better of her. Having failed to prevent them going on the trip, the best I could do was to give them my shikari Ramlakhan, who has worked for me since he was a boy. He first joined me with his father Ranjit and since Ranjit gave up the game through old age has been in charge of all my shooting bandobast.

Now I knew, although the police refused to believe it, that no loot on earth would persuade Ramlakhan to depart from the straight and narrow path, unless he had been murdered, and it was inconceivable that a gang of camp followers would get the better of him; he would have returned to me sooner or later. My arguments failed to make any impression on the police and I was equally disinclined to believe that he could have fallen a victim to a tiger. He had been in at the death of over a hundred and save for his old father, knew more about their ways than any man living.

There is little to tell about myself. I was thirty years old at the time these events took place. I had inherited my uncle's tea estate, but having a rooted aversion to office work had handed over the management to a better man than myself and spent the next ten years knocking about the world in search of big game.

I took several months to recover from my accident and almost four had elapsed before I was fit enough to take the trail in search of the missing girls. My first move was to visit old Ranjit at his village in Bihar as I valued his advice above everything and knew that he was just as anxious over the fate of his son.

I found the old man, he must have been over seventy, looking incredibly fit and absolutely determined to accompany me. We sat round my camp fire that night and went into the question from every conceiv-

able angle. He had once been on a shooting trip in the Golcooda hills with my uncle on whose tea estate he worked, but that had been many years ago and before the place had acquired its present unenviable reputation. I give you his story as he told it to me round our camp fire that night.

CHAPTER II

RANJIT'S TALE

"[T was in the time of Stanton Sahib, your honour's uncle, that I first entered Golcooda. Some sahibs had come up from Calcutta on a visit and it was decided to show them sport. I cannot remember their names now, but I well remember an engineer sahib, one who always talked of finding gold and was much laughed at by the other sahibs. We shot for many days and got good sport but always this sahib would be looking in the rivers and asking questions of the Goldars who inhabit all this area even to the borders of Nepal Terai. Now, the sahib was right in a way for there is gold there but only in such quantities as may be found in many rivers in Hindustan; just sufficient for a poor man who works all day to make a few rupees. I myself explained this to the sahib but he would have none of it and showed me pieces of rock, which proved to his own satisfaction that larger quantities of gold might be found.

One day the sahib left camp early and that was the last time that any of us saw him alive. By tiffin time the sahib had not returned so Stanton Sahib ordered a search to be made and I lost much faith with the sahib log over this matter. All my life I have followed the spoor of the jungle folk but the footsteps of this sahib went no further than a certain hill above our camp. It seemed to me that someone had removed all traces of footsteps but the sahib log laughed me to scorn and ordered that the search be continued; it was not until the following day that we found him.

There was a certain place where water from a small stream fell from a great height and it was there that we found the sahib, lying with a great stone across his chest and the water falling on his body from above. It was agreed amongst the sahib log that the stone must have been dislodged by the force of the water and so fallen upon the sahib. Even at that time it appeared strange to me that so little water should dislodge so great a stone, but who was I to argue against the wisdom of the sahibs? It seemed to me that this was an evil place and it was shortly afterwards that man-eaters appeared in Golcooda where they have remained ever since and killed many good sahibs."

That was Ranjit's tale more or less as he told it to me and I lay awake for hours turning it over in my mind.

It brought back memories of my uncle and I remembered his version of the engineer's death which had been put down as a genuine accident. He had also mentioned Ranjit's unaccountable failure to follow the dead man's tracks which should have stood out a mile to one who could follow a wounded beast even when the blood had ceased flowing and nothing was visible to the European eye.

I now had all the information I was likely to get but was I being logical or was I being led astray in my implicit faith in old Ranjit?

Was I right in accepting Ranjit's opinion that there was something fishy going on, even in those days, when my uncle and the remainder of his party had accepted the accident theory without any shadow of suspicion?

I jotted down the facts on a piece of paper next morning:

(1) Golcooda had once been a normal big game area.

(2) An ill-fated shooting trip resulting in the death of a man, who believed that gold in workable quantities existed in the area.

(3) Ranjit's suspicions due to the absence of tracks and his doubts about the actual accident.

(4) A whole series of deaths from man-eating tigers over a period of years.

(5) The complete disappearance of an expedition led by a faithful servant.

It certainly seemed enough to go on and I decided that, whatever the result, I would see it through.

I had never visited the Golcooda area although it lay close to my estate but I knew it to be typical hill country and very densely wooded. The inhabitants were aborigines and had at one time been recruited to pluck tea but my uncle had given up using them as they had proved to be quarrelsome and indolent. Their country had never been developed and even the missions had given them up as a bad job and ceased to waste time on such unpromising material. They lived on what they could kill with their bows and arrows and cultivated a little paddy in the valleys. Like most aborigines they used poisoned weapons and wore little but a waist clout. They lacked the cheerfulness that one generally associates with this type of people, and kept very much to themselves.

Ranjit told me that in my uncle's time they frequently came into the local town on market days but had long since ceased doing so and had now become a completely self-contained community occupying a few hundred square miles of jungle fastness.

Such was the area we decided to enter and I thought that the less said about our venture the better. It is quite impossible to keep anything in the nature of an expedition secret in India, but I made up my mind to travel light with twenty trusted followers from Ranjit's

village and take only one tent and very little baggage. This would give us a sporting chance of starting off from scratch.

Barbara Eve's trip had commenced from the village of Pindu, where the only motorable road comes to an abrupt end. There had once been some talk of extending it but the whole place had got such a bad name that no labour could be found to carry out the project and the benefits from opening up the country did not justify any special effort to get it done.

Over a dozen sportsmen must have seen their last glimpse of civilization when passing through this village as it was the obvious kicking-off place for a shooting-trip. For this reason I decided to start near the foothills which adjoined the Government reserved forests many miles further west.

This would disarm suspicion and I could cut across the girls' trail farther back as it seemed unlikely that they had come to grief during their first few days' trek.

Ranjit's porters could be relied on as the old man was very popular and they had all worked for me at one time or another. It was only fair to warn them that I expected trouble, which I did, and promised them double wages.

The only other member of the party was Brag, my bull mastiff. He had been given to me by Joan, who had found his views on the duties of a watch dog rather embarrassing in a civilized world. He had an uncertain temper and did not suffer fools gladly. He once saved my life when a dacoit broke into my tent while I was down with malaria, so you will not wonder when I say that Brag and I will never part while either of us are alive.

I took two rifles, a double barrelled .450 and a small Mannlicher with telescopic sights, which I have found unsurpassed for accuracy and very useful when

shooting for the pot. I also took two shot guns and many hundred rounds of buck shot which are an excellent antidote to short range arguments. Apart from ammunition, we cut everything else down to the bare minimum. We also took four hill ponies, one for Ranjit to ride and the remaining three as pack animals, which would also be useful if we had casualties to carry.

CHAPTER III

WE started on May the 25th and spent an uneventful three days skirting the edge of the Government reserved forests. On the fourth day we entered Golconda country and an air of alertness spread through the party. I was pleased to see it and realised that I had a good crowd with me.

I expected to hit the girls' trail either late in the evening or some time the following day and was more than surprised when one of the boys who had gone on ahead came running back with news of a deserted camp, but, although sufficiently interesting in itself, it had not belonged to the party we were looking for. There were tattered remains of three small tents pitched beneath a sheer wall of rock. This had protected them from the monsoon which would otherwise have obliterated everything.

The camp had obviously been deserted for over a year and I decided to spend the day there and see what we could glean. The larger of the three tents was complete with camp furniture, which had suffered severely from the depredations of white ants and was obviously that of a sportsman; the other two had belonged to servants and still contained worm-eaten remains of charpoys and some cooking utensils. There were no signs of firearms but I found a uniform case containing a selection of khaki kit and a large bag of small change which would have been carried on a shooting trip for paying beaters. The only other item of interest was a .45 Revolver bullet! It seemed a reasonable deduction that a revolver had been kept in

the case, which, judging by the untidiness of the contents, had been ransacked! The question I asked myself was, why should the thief have removed a revolver and left a large bag of cash which he could not possibly have missed? The answer was beyond me and I decided to spend the rest of the day searching the vicinity of the camp with Ranjit who had already made a discovery on his own.

He led me to the remains of a small "lean to" near the rock and showed me a collection of big game trophies. There were a couple of quite good sambhur heads and also a bison but the "piece de resistance" was the tattered remains of a tiger skin! So someone had shot a Golcooda man-eater! Ranjit brought the skin out into the sun and I think we both noticed the same thing simultaneously; there were no claws on the fore-paws! The skin, which had only been partly cured, had so deteriorated from exposure that it was impossible to see if these had been removed or were the result of a deformity. Ranjit shook his head and refused to venture an opinion so we continued our search, gradually quartering all the ground in the neighbourhood of the camp.

Our next discovery was in the bed of a stream which we followed for about two miles in the hope of picking up tracks and we were not disappointed. At first we found only deer tracks of which there were an incredible number and we were about to turn back when Ranjit whistled softly through his teeth and pointed towards the left bank. There, as plain as daylight, were the pug marks of a tiger and tigress and neither had claws on the fore paws! I have long ago lost all fear of the jungle but I think at that moment I was really frightened and experienced that prickly sensation down the spine which goes with it. The tracks were quite fresh and had probably been made during the night. It seemed impossible that a small part of India consisting of a few hundred square miles of jungle should contain a completely new species of

tiger. Ranjit was muttering to himself and I have never seen him so affected.

"Ah, Sahib," he remarked "truly this is an evil place."

I had had hopes of finding some trace of the missing sportsman but it was faint hope. A tiger leaves little of a human kill and the hyenas and jackals would have dealt faithfully with the rest. One might have found a firearm but in view of the rifled box this seemed unlikely. The man had either been murdered or killed by a man-eater, but someone had obviously been there since; someone who was interested in arms.

We returned to camp soon after midday and found the porters huddled together near my tent in absolute living terror and they had a horrible tale to tell. A tiger had just walked in, soon after our departure, killed one of the men and after dragging him a short distance had enjoyed an undisturbed meal in some light cover near the edge of the clearing. Our pack ponies which were tethered a considerable distance further out had remained unharmed and were still grazing peacefully; the whole thing was unbelievable and there was only one course open to me. I realized that I had to get that tiger and get it quick or the expedition would fail before we had started.

All the porters had seen and remarked on the deformed skin and this incident following immediately after had convinced them that it was an evil spirit and no ordinary tiger that had come amongst us. There was only one remedy to re-establish their morale and that was to prove to them as quickly as possible that we were dealing with something that was at least of this earth. Normally one would have examined the area, decided on the most likely line of retreat, and carried out a beat. This was a method I would have hesitated to use if the quarry had been a normal man-eater and I knew that it was absolutely out of the question under the present circumstances.

It was Ranjit who suggested a solution.

“Sahib, why does a tiger take man instead of his lawful prey?” he asked. The answer was obvious—a tiger takes to man-eating as the result of a wound, or old age, as this is the only prey left within his capabilities of execution. I saw his point immediately. We had proof of three clawless tigers and neither of us had a doubt that this one would prove to be the same. The pack ponies had been left untouched and we had seen tracks of deer, which would never have existed in such quantities in an area that was known to contain tiger—at least not with the normal Indian specimen. The solution was to back our fancy and follow up on the pack ponies. If we were wrong there would be a nasty incident but the stake was great. I had to find out the fate of the girl I loved and Ranjit had lost his son. Unless we killed the beast we would not go another yard as the porters, staunch as they were, would refuse to continue, and one could not blame them.

We left immediately on two of the ponies; Ranjit led the way covered by my heavy rifle with Brag, who refused to be left behind, anywhere, bringing up the rear. The trail was easy to follow and we ran into our quarry when still in ear-shot of the camp. He saw us immediately, whipped round as if to charge and then bolted. I had about five seconds in which to fire and broke his spine with my second shot. I might have lost him, as I missed with the first barrel, but he stumbled on to his nose which gave me the chance I wanted and we both leapt off our ponies to run up to him. He was a miserable specimen, barely taping eight feet. Every single claw on his fore-paws was missing; obviously gouged out in his youth!

I decided to sit back and think it out over a pipe before returning to camp. The pack ponies started to wander back and we let them go as it was the time for their evening meal. Old Ranjit was highly delighted.

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"Ah, Sahib," he remarked "we can now explain that this is the work of badmashes and not spirits, we are truly saved." I don't think the old man ever said a more untrue word! He was interrupted by a coughing roar and to our horror we saw another tiger charging straight at us in a queer stumbling run. He was almost a hundred yards off but even as I grabbed my rifle I realised that it was empty. I had broken the one golden rule that any fool with three weeks experience knows—in the excitement of the discovery I had failed to re-load!

"God what an end," I thought and at that moment Brag left my side and went bald-headed for it. The subsequent events are unbelievable. It turned like a cat and bolted with a howl of terror towards the camp which was less than four hundred yards away. Brag was on its tail and I followed as fast as I could, reloading as I ran and desperately afraid that it would turn on him, as no dog living can last more than a second against a tiger. The episode ended in farce. I arrived in camp to find that the brute had run into the rock face that extended behind our tents and was making desperate attempts to claw its way up. Every time it fell Brag was on it and the beast was too terrified to attempt to defend itself. It was impossible to get a shot and the porters rose in a body and pelted it with rocks when they could do so without hurting the hound. It died like a rat, as no tiger should, or for that matter ever has to my knowledge.

The porters were wild with excitement and vowed they would follow me anywhere but I realised that we were up against something incredibly bad, and I think Ranjit did too. This tiger was mutilated like the others and if we had kept the ponies would obviously never have attacked us. The deformity, which was caused by man, also affected their speed and the porters, who had thought their last hour had come, said that the second tiger stumbled twice before it ran towards the rock

where it possibly hoped to find a cave into which to bolt.

We buried our first casualty that evening and I concentrated the camp in a small gully that afforded protection from three sides. I had the ponies tethered in the entrance, an absurd but obvious precaution that made me feel that we were living an "Alice in Wonderland" existence.

I was beginning to see daylight at last. Someone had hit on a novel and gruesome method of keeping a complete area free from interference by producing a number, heaven knows how many, of deformed tigers. These could only live on human beings or any small game that was quite defenceless, but there was still much that was inexplicable.

CHAPTER IV

THE night was uneventful and I made an early start on the following morning. We were still only on the edge of Golcooda territory and I wished to pick up the girls' trail as close to Pindu village as possible without making our presence known for success was obviously going to depend on maintaining secrecy as long as possible so that I could see what we were up against before running into trouble.

Enormous quantities of game appeared to exist, mostly sambhur and bison, which this particular type of tiger could not hope to tackle, and we saw very few specimens of smaller game. It was late in the evening before we struck the small jungle track running from Pindu, which must have been used by the missing party.

We had moved in single file all day and had not been molested, probably because of the presence of the ponies, which we interspersed down the line. Some excitement was caused by finding a kill but this proved to have been done by a panther, which, judging by the tracks, was perfectly normal. I decided to camp in a clearing some distance off the track and took every precaution to make the place as secure as possible behind a light stockade which would just contain ourselves and the ponies. This entailed an enormous waste of time and would curtail each day's march by several hours, but I saw nothing else for it. In any case the weather was against us at this time of year and it prevented me from attempting to push the porters too fast.

I was woken up shortly after midnight by a low growl from Brag, who was sleeping beside me, and heard a faint jingling sound such as might be made by an animal in any of the local forms of harness and realized that someone was moving up the track. I was glad that I had decided to camp away from it and determined to investigate in the early morning.

I was up before dawn and rode out to the trail with Brag as I had ruled that either Ranjit, who could handle a gun, or myself, would always remain behind with the porters.

My guess of the night before proved correct and I found signs of a small tonga pulled by a pair of trotting bullocks having passed along the track. I made up my mind to follow it for an hour or two while it was still cool on the chance that it might have stopped. After some forty minutes Brag's hackles started going up, so I hastily dismounted and decided to risk going on on foot after tethering the pony.

I had known all along from my maps that the main Golcooda area lay in fairly high country but was not prepared for the sight that met my eyes as we emerged out of dense jungle into a long clearing skirting a river. Across on the other side lay some of the wildest-looking country I have ever seen, consisting of range upon range of low foot-hills leading to the dark mountain mass beyond. The river was fairly deep and the owner of the bullock tonga was squatting on the bank with his back towards me.

This was obviously a ford and he appeared to be enjoying a smoke before wading his bullocks across. I decided to wait and see what his next move would be, and studied the view through my glasses.

One thing was certain and that was that the maps were inaccurate. The area had never been surveyed since the last century and the old maps gave one no idea of the steep rise of the country or the number of foot-hills

which would have to be laboriously crossed before one really started to climb.

The man, having finished his smoke, proceeded to divest himself of his clothes, which were those of the ordinary poorer class of Indian, and hid them carefully under a rock. He then passed out of sight down the river bank, apparently to bathe, and reappeared dressed in the usual aborigine waist clout and carrying a bow under his arm. This was obviously the time for decisive action and waiting until he had turned to harness up the bullocks, I stepped swiftly out of cover with my rifle at the ready. I had not gone twenty yards before he whipped round with his bow half-drawn—I had not expected much in the nature of opposition and the arrow missed my ear by an inch, Brag was on him in a flash and got him down, so I dropped my rifle and joined in the scrimmage. He was covered in freshly applied grease from head to foot, and without the dog I would never have stood the chance unless I had used my hunting knife, which I would have hesitated to do. At this stage I still thought in terms of the law and a civilized world although later I was to realize that sixteenth-century conditions still exist in some parts of the world. With Brag's assistance the struggle was brief and I laid him out with one on the jaw before tying him up in his "civvy" clothes, which I unearthed from under the rock. I realized that one might easily be seen from the opposite bank so bundled him into the cart and drove the bullocks back into the jungle to where I had tethered the pony. I hitched the pony to the back of the cart, put Brag in with my assailant, and drove the whole collection back to camp.

We pulled our friend out on arrival and realized at once that he was dying. The porters carried him over to my tent, where I kept a medicine chest but there was nothing we could do for him. His left arm had swollen horribly in the neighbourhood of a small cut above the elbow. It was obviously poison and Ranjit showed me his bundle of arrows which were one and all

coated with a green, slimy substance. He had somehow contrived to wriggle onto one of his own arrows in the cart as I was certain that he had not done it during the struggle. I had noticed his light colour when I first spotted him and it was now obvious at a glance that the man was an Anglo-Indian. To say that I was thunder-struck is an under statement. I have been in many strange places but have never been so flabbergasted in my life as I was at that moment.

The cart contained a collection of stores that any planter, who lived out in the blue might have laid in when he did his monthly shopping expedition in the nearest town.

The only other item of interest was a sporting rifle complete with case, and I wondered why he chose to use his bow instead !

By this time, his whole arm had turned blue and I ordered them to bury him at once. As they were carrying him off I noticed a glint of gold on his finger and walked up idly to examine it. It was a massive gold ring, clumsily worked, and the crest was the one I bore on my own signet ring !

CHAPTER V

THE discovery of the ring bearing my family crest led me to do some quick thinking. The family had been in India for three generations and the tea estate was founded by my grandfather, who left it to his eldest son, my uncle, George Stanton. My father never came out to the country and nor would I have done if Uncle George had not died childless and left me the estate. I never met my grandmother who would never even mention his name.

My only link with the past was Ranjit and I decided to take him into my confidence and explain the significance of the ring. The old man was most reluctant to say anything but eventually admitted that my grandfather had been a hard man and much feared by all the coolies on the estate. He also remembered my grandmother, who had left the country after bearing him two sons and never returned. This I already knew and remembered being told as a child that she had a nervous break-down and died in England shortly afterwards.

If there was a bar sinister in the family it was a fairly safe bet that it came from my grandfather as my Uncle George had been a clean-living man and loved by everyone who met him. Ranjit was too much of the old family retainer to admit even to himself that there could be anything bad in any of us, but the episode of the ring had shaken him and I hoped that he would tell me more later on. His knowledge of the country was also very limited as he had only visited it once during the close of the last century and that was much further north than our present location.

When I had set out on this expedition I had been prepared for trouble of some sort but nothing of the magnitude that now appeared to be piling up. I toyed with the idea of sending for assistance as I knew a lot of good men who would welcome a month's leave and a spot of excitement but I decided against it. I was convinced that the girls were alive and a big show would spoil all chance of secrecy, which I considered essential at this stage.

There was, however, one obvious precaution. I could ensure that whatever fate befell me there would be some record left for those who followed after.

I told Ranjit that we would not move until the following morning and spent the rest of the day writing a full report of all that had happened to date. This I sealed and entrusted to one of the men and instructed him to take one of the ponies and deliver it to Travers, the manager of my estate. I omitted nothing and told Travers that if I had not got in touch with him in four weeks time he was to take what action he thought fit. The porter was an intelligent lad and by nightfall should have reached Pindu where he was not to tarry on any account. The loss of one of our precious ponies might have been serious but we had the two bullocks which would well serve as pack animals. The cart I ordered to be burnt after removing the stores, some of which I needed. The rest we buried, and spent the afternoon in removing all traces of the camp's existence.

The discovery that my maps were practically useless was going to complicate matters. I had seen enough of the country through my glasses to realize that it would be fatal to cross the river by the ford, which was bound to be watched. Ranjit agreed with me that it would be best to travel along the bank and cross much further down as it would probably be fordable in many places.

The night was uneventful and we moved off early next morning after a last look round to see that we had left no trace of the camp. A thunder-storm broke on

us shortly afterwards, a blessing we had not expected; it meant that anyone who came to look for the missing man would not find the tell-tale cart tracks which were beyond our power to remove.

The bullocks were splendid specimens and appeared to be quite used to the jungle but I took the precaution of removing the bells from their necks as these had been largely responsible for the downfall of their late owner.

We had been travelling for nearly five hours before we attempted to approach the river and spent the rest of the day marching along the banks in the hopes of finding a crossing and it was not until four o'clock that we found a possible place. This was the scene of our second disaster, and I blamed myself for not having anticipated it.

The first man had hardly entered the water when a crocodile got him; the pony he was leading blundered in after him and that went too. It was all over in a few seconds and there was absolutely nothing that we could have done. The water was only waist deep where they entered and in normal circumstances the risk of crossing should not have been great. The only answer was to build a raft which meant that we should not be across until noon the following day. Luck was against us with a vengeance as there was only a few weeks left before the rains broke and then we might be held up indefinitely.

The porters fell to with a will and I admired their spirit in carrying on under such circumstances. They cut down all the necessary trees before nightfall and I passed a bottle of whisky round to cheer them up as the place was too open to risk lighting a camp fire.

A tiger visited the camp during the night but the presence of the animals kept him off. I saw him once soon after midnight sitting up like a dog and watching the camp intently. He was a large beast but very emaciated and I imagine that most of the brutes must have been on the verge of starvation. He was still

about on the following morning and held up the work as the porters had to cut creepers with which to bind the raft together and would never get the job done that day if they had to go everywhere hampered by the ponies and bullocks. I did not wish to risk firing a shot before we made the crossing and it looked as if we might have to waste yet another day, until some bright spark suggested using the aborigine's bow. It was anyhow worth trying so we moved the animals out of sight on the far side of the camp which brought the tiger out immediately. One of the porters plugged him squarely in the ribs before he had made up his mind to charge and I put rifle up in case of accidents.

Under normal circumstances, nine tigers out of ten would have made themselves exceptionally nasty but these Golcooda specimens obeyed no known rules. The beast howled like a "banshee" and bit furiously at the shaft without making any attempt to either attack us or run. It died in agony twenty minutes later, poor brute. After this the work went on apace and our raft was ready by the afternoon. It would carry either six men or one animal and two men, which would be a tricky load to ferry across.

We waited until dark and luck was with us this time as the whole party made the trip in safety. A large mugger followed the raft on most of the trips but made no attempt to molest us which was just as well as it was a crazy contraption at the best and started to break up before the last load was across.

It was a clear moonlight night and what by day seemed grim and forbidding now took on an air of enchantment. It was hard to believe that this dark mountain mass skirted by a silvery river held some ghastly secret of appalling evilness. Listening to the gentle lap lap of the water my mind went back to Joan and a certain river which we had swum by moonlight on even such a night as this. Thoughts of happier times are ever apt to lull one into a sense of false security

and mine were switched into quite a different plane by the sudden whirr and rattle of a drum! I listened intently for a second or two and then the sound ceased.

Drums are a common feature of the marriage season in India but this one sent a message, if I was not mistaken, and recalled a time in Africa, the only place where I have heard such music. A minute passed, and then another, until I heard the sound I had half-expected. Further away this time but unmistakably the same note taken up by another drummer and passed on as surely as any telegraphic system.

It was idle to speculate on the nature of the message; perhaps it signified that our arrival in the forbidden land had been seen and reported, or possibly only a matter of retailing the village gossip.

Whatever the significance I was determined to investigate. I have ever been prepared to meet trouble half way and decide to utilize my ability to travel in the jungle by night. I acquired this gift during a short sojourn with some ivory poachers and it has frequently proved useful.

Leaving Ranjit to bed down the camp, I stole out with Brag as my only companion.

CHAPTER VI

I HAD a good idea of the direction of the first drum which could be little more than couple of miles away and relied on Brag as a sufficient deterrent to unwelcome attentions from any Golcooda tiger; I also had a shrewd idea that we would see no more of them. No community could exist with such things about and what better protection than to loose them in the surrounding plains jungle with a crocodile infested river as one's second line of defence and a preventative against having so unwelcome a monstrosity coming back on one.

What sort of country lay in the high hills I could not foresee but knew that the intervening fifty miles from the river was cut up by ranges of low foot-hills and would entail a four days' march at the very least before we could expect to start climbing. This sort of going is the most trying in the world and would discourage anyone attempting it for the mere sake of sport.

Brag and I had covered little more than a mile before we saw the twinkling lights of a small village, nestling beneath the first series of foot-hills. Something appeared to be in the wind as it is most unusual to find an Indian village lit up so late at night.

Stealth was definitely indicated and I crept forward with infinite caution until we reached the outskirts. Brag is intensely obedient but I prayed that we wouldn't bump a pi-dog as there are limits to even canine endurance and Brag hated them with a deep contempt.

It was the usual small jungle village consisting of less than thirty huts and most of the adult members

were gathered round the man with the drum. They appeared to be expecting something and I crawled up as close as I dared. My apprenticeship on the tea estate had given me a fair smattering of the hill dialect in these parts and I could catch an odd word here and there. The conversation was mainly on trivial matters but there was no mistaking the air of tension. I waited nearly an hour, suffering a plague of mosquitoes before the other drum began to speak again. A long message this time, which was answered by a few taps from the drummer in the village. A babble of conversation immediately broke out and I gathered that someone pretty important was missing and it was a safe bet that they were referring to the deceased Anglo-Indian. There were also vague references that I could not catch to someone referred to as 'the master'. The next remark startled me to such an extent that I nearly sat up bolt upright; I must have made some sound as one or two looked in our direction but appeared satisfied that it was nothing out of the ordinary. Brag, bless his heart, lay like a log with his head resting against my knee. The remark in question referred to a white woman and I strained my ears to pick up the gist of the conversation. An old grey-beard remarked that nothing but trouble would attend their coming and someone else chipped in to say that it was a bad day for Ratu when the woman escaped! This was real news and a thrill ran through my whole body. So the girls had not fallen victims to a Golcooda tiger and at least one of them must be alive. After this the party broke up and I heard no more of any interest; at least I had achieved something but I was still groping in the dark.

No dangers attended our return to camp and I lay down and turned the whole matter over in my mind. Up till now I had largely been influenced by normal civilized rules and it was now obvious that I was up against a highly illegal organization. Some master mind had exploited one of the most inaccessible parts of India and built up a legend of man-eating tigers, which had accoun-

ted for any wandering sportsmen that entered the area, tigers that were a myth in the respect that they were a product of human ingenuity. The reason behind all this I as yet did not know but suspected mineral wealth of some sort. What had happened to the girls I knew not and it did not bear thinking about at this stage.

The remainder of the night passed very quickly and I had made up my mind before dawn broke. I decided to put the porters in the picture and if they were willing to see the show through I would bivouac in the safest area I could find and make no further move until I had gathered further information.

I called them all round me before we marched and put the whole thing to them. They were with me to a man and only requested that they should be armed at the first opportunity, a suggestion that I was only too ready to agree to. Our last precaution before moving off was to conceal our raft so that our line of retreat across the river might be assured.

The country we passed through that day certainly lived up to my expectations as we no sooner topped one foot-hill before we were ascending the next ; the valleys in between were negligible and the whole country rose steeply. We moved in single file and avoided all tracks as I wished to maintain absolute secrecy until I had established a fairly safe base to operate from. Ranjit led the way on his pony as the old man has a wonderful eye for country. And I followed close behind. He appeared not too happy about something and paused frequently until I asked him what the matter was.

"Listen, Sahib" he replied and I heard that typical bird call that one hears in the jungle at night, a sort of "Toc Toc". The significance was lost on me for a few seconds until I realized that it was nearly midday ! It came again on our left and was answered by someone further back. I whispered to Ranjit to carry on while I stepped out of the line and allowed them to pass me.

We had certainly been discovered and followed but if there were only two of them the situation might be retrieved. I did not want to use firearms at this stage but realized that there was nothing else for it. My small Colt automatic seemed the best solution as the sound would not carry far in such thick cover. I must have waited ten minutes on the trail before my "night bird" arrived and I recognized him immediately as one of the party from the night before, an evil looking fellow carrying a bow at the ready and clad in little that was not provided by nature. I will not shoot a man down in cold blood and salved my conscience by calling out to him as he passed. Even so I had to fire twice and he made a desperate effort to draw his bow as the first bullet struck him.

I waited another two minutes and then ran as fast as I could up the path. Ranjit heard the shot faintly and halted the party but the other watcher had not and I again heard the cry of a night jar as I reached the porters.

I sent five men back to bury the man and collect his weapons and told Ranjit to carry on as if nothing had happened and to make a fair amount of noise. Brag and I with four of the best trackers moved off to the left flank and proceeded as quickly as possible. The next time we heard the bird call it was only a hundred yards ahead and I sent Brag on with a wave of my hand. We heard a shriek of fear followed by a dull thud and ran like rabbits towards the sound; it was a mere youth this time and I only pulled Brag off just in time. We took care that he had no opportunity of doing away with himself and rejoined the main body with our first prisoner. The five men had returned from their task and our armament was now increased by two more bows.

I wished to waste no time in questioning the man at this stage and told Ranjit to move off along the next valley. This contained a small rocky water-course and we followed it for ten miles before striking off again

towards the mountain range. It was desperately hard going but we left no tracks and both man and beast were dead beat before we began to climb again.

I pushed them unmercifully and by nightfall I had found the place I wanted. A small valley near a stream with the whole of one end blocked by a landslide. The stream, which was a tiny one, had found its way round through a fault in the rock face but I realized that our position might be untenable when the rains broke. It was unlikely that anyone would come on us by either foot-hill as the going was vile; the open end of the valley was easily defensible.

Our prisoner had marched with us on the end of a rope and had lost most of his fear when offered food during a short halt. He obviously expected to come to a sticky end and I hoped that he would prove useful.

I made Ranjit put all our cards on the table and explain the object of our expedition. The boy, he was little more, was then given the chance of becoming our ally or remaining a prisoner. In any case he would be watched and I decided that the risk of losing him was well worth while under the circumstances. We also explained to him that we were only the advance party of a great influx of invaders, who would enter the country as we had, and put an end to the reign of terror. He decided on the former course and I think he was greatly influenced by the fact that we had penetrated further into the country than anyone in living memory. This is the gist of his story, which we got out of him bit by bit:

The country was ruled by 'The Masters' who lived on the mountain. The villagers paid no land rent but were expected to carry out any orders that came from above and only village headmen ever saw these people. Speculation and gossip on the subject was discouraged but it was generally accepted that their rulers were of white origin.

The mutilated tigers were exported from the mountain and loosed in the plains jungle beyond the river. All the villagers lived in holy terror of them and it was generally believed that anyone who fell foul of 'The Masters' was sacrificed to the training of these monstrosities. Nearly everyone who entered the country beyond the river fell a victim to them and no one attempted to get out. Lately there had been trouble as the party belonging to the white women had been ambushed and two girls captured; this was all mixed up with some old legend that the hills would be free again once a white man crossed the river and entered Golcooda proper.

The boy was very hazy about this part of the tale but he knew that one of the women had escaped with a shikari belonging to the party and was believed to be hiding in the West. She had not been recovered as the villagers in that area had revolted against the authority of 'The Masters' and refused to give her up. Everyone was expecting war and now further trouble was brewing as one of the 'Masters' had failed to return from a journey. This was all the boy could tell us but it was welcome news and I went to sleep with a plan already in my mind.

CHAPTER VII

I SLEPT like a log that night and I think it was the first time that I had any peace of mind for months. One of the girls was anyhow still alive and the disaffected area might well come in on my side. One gathered from the boy's account that whoever it was who ruled in the mountains had 'lost face' by bringing white people into the country and were faced by a rebellion against their authority. The boy could not tell me where the white woman lay seemed willing to lead me to the area of revolt which he said was little more than a day's march.

I did not wish to lose my present bivouac area, which was well protected, and as yet unknown to anyone. I could trust Ranjit to hold the fort and decided to set out myself with the guide and ten men.

We left soon after dawn, taking one pony only and travelling as light as possible. Our guide, who said his name was Khaita, set a pace that we were hard put to keep up with, but we were now travelling along the valleys and the going was much easier. I called a short halt at midday and we carried on again at the same breath-taking pace. The air was cooler now that we were in the hills, otherwise we would never have kept it up.

Several times during the day we saw tracks of tiger and I was relieved to see that they were normal. By the evening Khaita considered that we were near our destination and I was about to call a halt for the night when we ran slap into a party of wood cutters armed to the teeth with bows and spears. There was nothing for it and I raised my hands in a gesture that is recog-

nized the world over. There were only eight of them but my unarmed porters would not have stood a chance. Khaita explained our errand but they were taking no risks and relieved me of my rifle. The pistol under my left shoulder was not noticed and I still had the chance of shooting my way out if the worst came to the worst. I had great difficulty in controlling Brag and thought for a moment that they might kill him but they allowed me to tie him up with a piece of rope off the pack pony. They were obviously three parts convinced that we were all right but said that the headman of the village would have to decide our fate.

We were nearing the village and crossing an open clearing when Brag let out a deep-throated bay and tore himself out of my hands. The hound appeared to be half demented and hurled himself forward with the loose end of rope trailing behind him. Our captors who had hitherto said nothing shared my astonishment and we could hear the dog giving tongue long after it was out of sight.

Ten minutes later we were in the village and there was my Joan lying on the ground half smothered by the great hound, who was still unable to control his music and had brought the whole population out with his uproar.

I ran towards her and the next moment she was in my arms and no man stopped us; I think they saw something in our faces and knew that here were two people whom only death would part again. "Darling Darling," she cried "I knew you would come one day." Six months in the jungle had not spoilt her beauty and her face and arms were tanned a rich brown. We were interrupted by the arrival of the village headman with Ramlakhan and I realised that I owed him a debt I could never hope to repay. He said that the "Miss Sahib" would tell me about the first part of their adventure and put me rapidly in the picture over the present situation.

They had escaped from the mountain five months ago and after a ghastly journey lasting over twelve days had arrived in the village where they had been extremely well treated. He confirmed Khaita's legend about the belief that the country would be free when the first white person crossed the river and said that all the villages in the western foot-hills had risen in revolt after their arrival. Escape was impossible as no one dared to enter the tiger country beyond the river and he could not risk it with Joan on his hands. Although the locals realized that these beasts would not attack animals they held the place in such dread that nothing would persuade them to enter it. The revolt had only led to minor clashes with neighbouring villages, but they lived in daily dread of some major action by the people in the mountains. So far no leader had appeared to organise resistance but most of them had complete faith in their legend and would follow any white man who gave a lead. He thought it would be possible to get together four or five hundred men capable of using bows and spears.

This was briefly the story that Ramlakhan had to tell and he left it to Joan to fill in the missing parts. He was delighted to hear that his old father was with me and suggested that we should turn in for the night and make our plans on the morrow.

They had built a small, two-roomed hut for Joan on the outskirts of the village and she led me to it after we had handed over my porters to the headman who would feed them. It was a primitive little place and Ramlakhan had served as her cook, servant, and guide, sleeping every night on the little verandah outside during all the months they had been there. They had escaped with four of the original camp servants but two had been killed before they reached safety and the others had died since. She had brought away some of her kit and Ramlakhan had retrieved sufficient to keep her adequately clothed.

Every woman is proud of her home but I was astounded to see how comfortable she had made it; everything had been put together in the village but it was spotlessly clean and the floor carpeted with skins. She showed a childish delight in taking me round and I noticed that she even had earthenware vases holding jungle flowers. "Darling, you are marvellous," I told her.

"John, promise not to leave me again" she cried. "Not for a moment." I drew her to me and reassured her in such a way that she had to tear herself out of my arms, protesting that she would never get "dinner" ready at this rate.

I forget what we ate but it was a simple meal and extremely well cooked; afterwards she told me her tale and it was midnight before she had finished.

"And not a word more" she concluded. "You must be dead beat, my sweet, and it's long past my bed time." Ramlakhan brought a charpoy into the living-room for me and we wandered out for a last breath of air before turning in. Brag had completely abandoned me and followed Joan wherever she moved and I slept without him by my side for the first time in almost two years. Actually it was hours before I slept but my mind was full of a great content as I listened to her even breathing in the next room.

CHAPTER VIII

JOAN'S STORY

THE following is Joan's story, commencing from the day that Barbara Eve's ill-fated Party left Pindu village, which was their last contact with civilisation. I would mention that few, if any, women have started off on a big game trip without a male escort of their own race; the reason is obvious. But Barbara Eve is one of those girls who spend their lives in proving to their own satisfaction that woman is man's equal. However, that is beside the point, and I will give you Joan's story as she told it to me that night in her own words.

"We started off in fine fettle and with everything on a most lavish scale. A pal of Barbara's who had been in the country for years, had engaged all the servants and shikaris and handed them over to us at Pindu. She had arranged this as she was warned that none of the locals near the Golcooda area would be likely to volunteer whatever the pay offered to them. I think most of our men had been 'got at' in Pindu, and it struck me at the time that some of them were apprehensive, although Barbara would have none of it and accused me of getting the wind up before we had even started.

The first day was great fun and we had a tiger round the camp that night. I was beginning to realize why Jungle life had such a hold over you and got quite a thrill thinking that I might bag one for myself. We had brought buffaloes with us to tie up, and Barbara decided to camp there for a day or two and ordered one to be tied up the next afternoon. Our troubles

started from that moment as one of the shikaris was killed on the way back to the camp. The wretched man's body was not recovered and we were absolutely staggered to find the buffalo quite untouched on the following morning. Barbara and I went out to look at it with the head shikari and she decided to leave it there and sit up after dark. This decision was nearly our undoing as we had hardly left the beast before we realised that we were being followed. That girl had certainly got guts, as she decided to drop behind when we crossed the next clearing and take her chance of a shot on foot as it came out into the open. I had not gone thirty yards with the shikari before we heard a couple of shots and dashed back to her. She had dropped it dead and was absolutely wild with excitement.

'Joan', she cried, 'I've got one and I guess that Englishman of yours must be just plain scared. I was wild with her for that remark, but we were both too excited to get acrimonious just then. It was rather a mangy-looking brute and I could see that she was a bit disappointed. The shikaris did not improve matters either by remarking on the fact that the claws were missing from the fore feet. We got it back to camp a few hours later and was everyone pleased? They seemed to think that the dead man had been avenged and that the chaps back in Pindu must have been kidding after all.

Nothing else happened that night and as the buffalo had not been touched she decided to move further into the interior.

I will say that was some trek! We had not travelled five miles before a tiger got someone behind us. He had stayed back to look at the view or something and that was the last anyone saw of him. After that everyone kept up fine and we pitched camp about four o'clock. The cook's assistant was the next to go, apparently he went down to the stream to get some

water for our tea and a tiger got him too. This was getting beyond a joke and even Babs began to see that there must be something in this Golcooda business and apologised handsomely for her remark about your being scared.

Everyone packed round our tent that night, which was kind of comforting as there must have been four tigers round us and although we did not know it at the time it was the buffaloes that kept them off.

I never slept a wink and wished we had never come on the trip. Babs was scared too but she didn't like to show it and raised hell with the shikari next morning when he suggested turning back. She said "Nothing doing" and told him to tie all the buffaloes up, which he agreed to do as it should at least have kept the tiger out of the camp. We lost no one that day but one party got chased back and I've never seen anyone run faster, they just came into the camp like greased lightning and I doubt if any buffaloes got tied up more than four hundred yards away.

The next night was pure horror. We had fires all round us but they just walked in and helped themselves. We lost eight men and Babs and I killed three of the beasts and must have hit at least four more, after an hour or two they realised that it wasn't too healthy and kept off.

There was no question of not turning back now even if we hadn't found all the buffaloes grazing peacefully in the morning! That put the lid on it and the rest of the party realised like you had that we might get away with it if we kept them nice and close to us. The three tigers we shot were mangy brutes and they all had their toes missing. We found one of the poor lads, who had been taken. He had been horribly clawed up but was still alive and the tiger that got him must have stopped one of our bullets. There was not a hope of saving him but we had to wait an hour while we doctored him and got a litter made.

We had just about got the job done, when a party of some twenty aborigines walked in on us, led by a couple of fair chaps carrying rifles. These two were dressed just like the rest but one could see at a glance that they were half white. One of them gave an order and they had our party trussed up like fowls in no time. The other one walked up to Babs and said in English 'I am afraid you have the honour to be our captives, Lady'.

'I like your cheek,' she replied and pulled a hand gun on him. I don't know how he did it but he was as quick as lightning and damn near broke her wrist. I think that was the first time in her life that she realised that there was not all that much in this equality of the sexes business! She looked at him a long time and realised that she was facing the first man that ever got the better of her, even though he was not wearing pants. The other chap was the split image of him and we learnt later that they were twins.

I don't know what we expected but they treated us well enough and allowed Ramlakhan and four of the servants to stay with us; all the rest including the lad who had been mauled were taken off into the jungle and they did not come back. They refused to tell us where they were taking them, but I guess they were all left for the tigers although we didn't know it at the time.

The chap that got the drop on Joan called himself Carlos and was the king pin of the outfit. His brother had an Indian name, Lalbahadur they called him, but he never said much and I don't think he liked the business. The rest of them were just plain savages.

They brought up two little carts with trotting bullocks and told us we could take one tent and as much kit as would go on the cart with it. After that they bundled us into the other one and we were off. The bullocks kept up a trot for hours and the rest of the party just padded along behind us. The track was not bad but it's not the way I'd have chosen to travel.

Just before dusk we hit the river and crossed by a ford where the water ran pretty fast but was not much more than a foot deep. There was another gang of savages guarding a fort on the opposite side, and I got the impression that they did not much like the look of us. However, they were scared stiff of Carlos and he had them all running round getting a camp ready.

Babs and I were so tired we just dropped off to sleep the moment we got settled in; I think we both expected the worst but no one touched us. I was scared stiff but Babs seemed to be enjoying it. It sounds impossible, but I was beginning to realise that she was not quite normal and even then suspected that she was getting a crush on Carlos. I have known her off and on for years and she has always been too busy raising hell to take much notice of men. She had a complex on the subject but seemed well on the way to losing it now.

CHAPTER IX

JOAN'S STORY CONTINUED

RAMLAKHAN woke us up with some grub next morning but he never got an opportunity of saying anything as Carlos was hanging about outside. We had slept in our clothes but he did not even give us a chance to wash and told us we would have to hit the trail right away.

'What do you aim to do with us?' Babs asked him.

'That just depends on how well you behave,' he replied and looked at her a long while.

While they were sizing each other up I glanced at Ramlakhan, who shook his head ever so slightly and I guessed he was warning me to say nothing. Lalbahadur came up then and interrupted the party; he would not look at either of us and talked to Carlos in the native lingo. It must have been about us as he went off looking pretty mad.

'I must apologise for my brother,' said Carlos, 'He's got a wife of his own and is prejudiced against your race, but you must not mind him', and he smiled at Joan.

He was a good-looking man in his way and obviously as tough as you make 'em. The whole crowd was against us but they wouldn't say so while he was around.

We set off in the same way as the previous day except that the track began to climb almost at once and the rest of the party had to help push us up the steep places. No savage ever made that road; it was a beauti-

ful bit of work and obviously designed by an engineer, which was strange. Some of the corners were pretty hair raising but those bullocks knew their job and after a bit I got used to it. We only stopped once in order to eat, and rested an hour before moving on again. There was nothing to see, just dense jungle all around, until late in the evening we suddenly came up on to a plateau. It was only a few miles square and one might have been back at home in open grass country. We must have climbed over two thousand feet and it was more of a ledge than a plateau as one side fell down sheer, the way we had come, but beyond there was mountain, going up another four or five thousand feet. It was a change being on the flat again but it was too dark to see anything. After a bit I dropped off to sleep and only came to when we stopped outside a European house, all lit up from end to end.

I just could not believe it and kept on thinking I was dreaming when we were led in and shown our rooms, just like a planter's house anywhere in India. I imagine Babs was thrilled and she tried to make me kid myself that it was all great fun. There was an old servant, the first person we had seen wearing any clothes, and he showed us to our rooms with bathrooms and tubs of hot water all laid on. I did not much like the idea of being separated from Babs but the bath was good and I was hungry enough to get into some clean clothes and come out after some food.

We had not seen Carlos since we arrived and when I found the drawing room Babs had not appeared. It was some room that, mostly everything dated back to the early eighteen and there was not a single modern thing to be seen. There was a big picture of an old boy with whiskers and I was wondering why it seemed kind of familiar when Babs bounced in, followed by Carlos wearing a shirt and pants!

'Welcome' he said to me. 'I have been showing Barbara round the house.' I was so staggered that

I couldn't think of a word to say. Babs was quite at home and had another attempt at making me think it was all good clean fun.

Dinner was hell—not that the food was bad but everything in the room was ancient and I hated that cool, smiling devil at the end of the table. He and Babs chattered away as if they had known each other for years and he told us that Lalbahadur had his own house and lived entirely as a native. I only spoke when they asked me a question and slipped off to bed the moment we finished eating.

I was dead beat but I only slept for an hour and woke up feeling pretty lonesome and damn frightened. I found I could think straight for the first time for days, and made up my mind that I just had to see Babs and have it out with her.

I guessed roughly where her room was and started out with a pocket torch to find her.

I found the door all right! She had left it open but it did not take me a second to learn that she was not alone. That was the worst blow of all and I don't even remember how I got back again.

I slept eventually and woke up knowing that there was someone in the room. It only took me a moment to turn the torch on and it was Ramlakhan, bless him! I just cried with relief and he stood about all embarrassed and told me in broken English that he was the sahib's man and if I was prepared to take a chance he'd die if necessary to get me away. He had no plan but I felt a hundred per cent better for seeing him and he told me to shout if I wanted any help at night.

He left by the window and I slept like a log after that. It is good to know that one has a friend, which is a fact one is apt to forget these days. I woke up early next morning and found Carlos out on the

verandah; he was all dressed up as a savage again but I was beyond being surprised at anything by now.

‘Good morning, Joan’, he said to me. ‘I hope you had a good night’.

‘Listen,’ I replied, ‘I know what happened last night and I do not want to talk about it, but we want to get out of this place quick or there will be trouble in a big way—See?’ He just smiled at me in a self-satisfied way and then laughed. I kept my temper somehow and asked him what he intended to do with us.

‘I don’t know,’ he told me, ‘but a man needs more than one woman in this place and I think you will prove amusing. I do not like them too easy’. I told him that I would rather kill myself first but he just smiled again and walked off.

I told Barbara a thing or two when she appeared and mentioned what the swine had said to me. I might as well have been talking to a stone wall: she would not believe me and said she had at last met the man who was worthy of her and so on. It nearly made me sick and we never spoke to each other again during the week I lived there. If it had not been for Ramlakhan I think I should have gone mad. They allowed him all the freedom he wanted but made him work in the house with the rest of our servants. No one had ever escaped out of the place and I suppose they did not think it worth while to take any precautions. I was never molested but you can imagine the atmosphere I lived in those seven days.

CHAPTER X

JOAN'S ESCAPE

WE all enjoyed complete freedom during this period and the only precaution Carlos took was to tell me all the awful things that happened to people who tried to escape. Our own servants were all kept busy about the house as he only kept one man and there was now much more to be done. Both Ramlakhan and I learnt a lot and we had soon pieced together the history of the place. The plateau, or ledge, had been discovered by your grandfather and the old man originally intended to grow tea there. He kept very quiet about his discovery and built the bungalow as a home for the woman he was keeping as he had already quarrelled with your grandmother over her. She was a hill woman and bore him twin sons. Carlos and Lalbahadur, but heaven knows what strange fancy tempted him to bring up Carlos himself and allow the other twin to be brought up as an aborigine by his mistress. I think he must have been going nuts after the mess up over his marriage and the loss of his wife, who left him and returned to England with the children. Anyhow he appears to have been happy enough up there and I think he wanted to get another tea business going so that his illegitimate family could live in peace without stirring up a lot of mud.

Whatever he intended to do, it all went by the board when he discovered the gold. I saw it myself, a huge reef, that is quite played out now but there must be oodles of the stuff stored up there as no one has ever taken any of it out of the country.

I think this discovery sent him completely off his balance, not that he wanted it himself, but he thought it might attract the public to come up and spoil his little private preserve. He must have had a big hold over the locals in those days and he knew that they would not want the country opened up any more than he did. He decided to work the gold and dished out just enough of the stuff to keep a little private army of his own, big enough to discourage anyone who managed to hit on the place by accident.

When the boys were about fifteen years old the old man died on his own estate and the elder of his legal heirs inherited it. He had kept his secret so darn well that no one even suspected it and his second family lived up on the mountain in peace until your uncle nearly landed in the middle of it during a hunting trip.

One of his party got a bit nosy and someone heaved a rock of him, which might have blown the gaff on the whole show but they managed to make it look like an accident. That saved the situation for the time being but it put the wind up them all until young Carlos hit on the idea of turning the tigers to his own account. He found out that if they were mutilated sufficiently to prevent them from tackling any beast that was not helpless, it produced a pretty nasty brand of man-eater. They have a regular zoo up there and Lalbahadur runs the show ; I guess some pretty ghastly things must have happened during the training of those tigers, which were shipped across the river directly they were ready. That river was another bright idea of Carlos' and they soon had the place so that no one could get in or out, and those that got uppish went to the tigers, or the crocs, whichever had not had a meal recently. This was the standard punishment for anyone who made a mistake and you cannot wonder that they have kept the place so nicely under control all these years.

Lalbahadur was pure aborigine to all intents, but Carlos had been educated by his father up to the age of

fifteen and made a few trips into the outside world. He knew the gold was no damn good to him unless he could get it away but he was clever enough to realise that he would never stand a chance in civilization and I think this was at the back of his mind when he waylaid our party.

We learnt that they had spies outside and knew weeks before that we were coming. Lalbahadur was against it and so were the rest of the mountain men as they would get short shrift if the country were opened up, and they hadn't any hankerings after civilization like Carlos, but they were all plumb terrified of him and had to carry out his orders. Another big headache for them would be the people in the foothills, who hated them but could not afford to say so. They had a legend down there that all their troubles would end when the white men came into the country and it was rather splitting hairs to bring a couple of white women in.

This was the general picture by the time we fetched up there; I got most of the dope from Carlos, who was never tired of talking about himself, and Ramla-khan fitted in the missing bits. I hated Babs for what she had done but after a bit I began to feel sorry for her. At the time she fell for him, she looked on him as a kind of romantic bandit defying the world, which went down in a big way with her. When she discovered that he was responsible for all that ghastly tiger business it shook her but she would not admit it even to me. Besides, there was not all that much to Carlos when one got to know him better; he might be tough and cunning but he had a mind like an animal and used to get all blown up with his own conceit. If he had fallen in with a common adventuress there is no knowing what lengths he might have gone to with all that wealth behind him, but he picked a loser in Barbara who had more money than she knew what to do with and was really as straight as a die. He wanted something but had not the education to know exactly what, which

was the only thing that had kept him shut up in Golcooda for so long.

When Ramlakhan told me that he had a plan for getting out I used to play up to Carlos and tell him what a clever fellow he was. I could not do this when Babs was around but it went down well when I got the chance and I think he thought I was falling for him. It made him chatty and he used to give away most of the information I wanted.

I learnt that they had several hundred fighting men up there, mostly armed with bows and spears but about thirty had guns and knew how to use them. This little force were known as 'the mountain men' and policed the whole area. The villagers down below could muster several thousand but they lived in such holy terror of the chaps up above that they had never been known to cause any real trouble and I do not blame them.

The only practical way up was by the road we knew and that was guarded day and night. There were several game trails but these were so tricky that they were only watched by a small roving patrol. Their chief fear was that a shooting party might get through the tiger country and hit on the ford. The game trails were only known to the villagers in the foothills and nothing on earth would persuade them to come up anyhow.

We chose the seventh day on which to make a break for it; we had no real plan once we were out of the house, except that we must make for the edge of the plateau and try to find a game path leading down to the foothills. We determined to leave in the evening and it had to be that particular night as it gave us the maximum amount of moonlight. I decided to tell Babs but I knew what her answer would be and was not surprised when she said 'No'. She wished me luck and promised to hold things up as long as possible which was the least she could do under the circumstances.

We found no sign of a guard round the house and got away soon after ten o'clock when everyone was asleep. Ramlakhan was marvellous; he persuaded the servants to come with us and even arranged for some of my kit to be carried. Not content with this he pulled out a couple of rifles from Carlos' private armoury.

We got away O. K. but could we find a way out? We followed the edge of that darn plateau for miles before we found a place where we could go down without breaking our necks. Even when we did find a path it was steep enough to puzzle a mountaineer and we were all dead beat before daybreak. We rested for an hour then, all except Ramlakhan, who went on ahead to see if there really was a way down, and came back to say that it was just possible. It was absolute hell and I spent most of my time sliding from tree to tree and trying not to follow some of the rocks I dislodged.

We must have gone down about five hundred feet before the hue and cry started and I realised what it was like to be hunted oneself. They kept calling out to each other, which helped us a bit but the trouble started when we had to negotiate a miniature land-slide. They knew we had to cross it sooner or later and laid up for us but I do not think they expected to find us so far down.

The only thing to do was to take a chance and run the gauntlet. Ramlakhan went first and got over in spite of a shower of arrows. I was the next across and as no one had a shot at me I guessed that Carlos had given instructions that I was to be taken alive. They got the boy who followed me and he pitched straight down the slide, poor soul. I sung out to the remainder to wait a bit and tried my hand with a rifle. I never was much of a shot but I shook up the archery party, who were all bunched together near the top, and it enabled the next two to get across safely. This only left one more to go but he slipped and lost his balance and they turned him into a pin cushion before he could

recover himself. Those swine could certainly shoot and they were not just browning us as they knew that they could not afford to hit me. I was so mad that I wanted to stay and shoot it out but Ramlakhan was not having any and lugged me off. That land-slide certainly saved us as they obviously thought they had us cold on the crossing and it gave us a pretty long start once we were over. I do not think they liked our rifles much either and could not have been told that we were armed.

We had no more trouble that day and we were down in the foothills before dark. It was a miserable night as we had no grub as that had all gone down the khud with the two boys they killed, and we dared not light a fire.

Carlos had told me about the drums and the moment they started up we guessed they were broadcasting our escape. It gave one the creeps listening to them but I was too tired to care much what they did that night and just dropped off to sleep the moment we stopped.

We travelled all next day and tried to keep to the valleys as much as possible. Towards evening; we ran into a party of the locals and thought our number was up but they did nothing, only stared and let us go. It was the same every day after that but the further west we got the friendlier they became. We had no food the first day but after that we obtained it in the villages, although they would not let us stay and always seemed glad to see the last of us. This went on for several days until we wandered in here where we have stayed ever since.

The headman has been grand and has done everything he possibly could for us except get us out of the place. They are all terrified of crossing the river and it would not have done us much good if we had got across as the 'mountain men' have got the low-down on their own brand of tiger and would be there waiting for us.

Our lads have plucked up a lot of courage lately as several months have gone by without an attack from the mountain. I think Carlos is afraid of a general rising, which might be hard to quell, and Ramlakhan has spread the glad news that the white men would soon be coming to look for me, and free the land into the bargain.

A few days ago it looked like trouble but the news that Lalbahadur was missing must have held things up. I knew you would come one day but I realised you could not move for some time, and I've had a feeling that it has been rather touch and go lately.

Carlos did not know where we were at first but they have beaten up most of the villages further East and they know right enough now. The two servants that escaped with us lost their nerve early on and just died; being townsfolk I suppose they could not take it, and I've felt that way myself at times."

CHAPTER XI

SUCH was Joan's story, and my first inclination on waking next morning was to make a dash for it and try to get our whole party out. On second thoughts, I realised that it could not be done as the mountain men would be over in the tiger country in force. Also it would be a dirty trick to desert the people who had helped Joan and who believed that we would be the instruments of their salvation.

We also had Barbara to consider and I could not even hazard a guess at what the answer to that problem would be. Our troubles were obviously far from over but I do not think either of us had a care in the world that morning. I immediately sent for Ranjit as the old man would want to see his son and we needed his advice concerning our next move. Leading a tribal revolt is not the sort of thing one steps into lightly and I hoped to avoid bloodshed as far as possible. The headman had sent off news of my arrival to the other villages and hoped to have all the leaders in by the afternoon so Joan and I decided to make the most of the day as it would be the last occasion that we would be likely to have time to spare.

She showed me round the village and pointed out some of her improvements, which had been adopted gradually by those rather conservative people. It was a normal jungle village but now much cleaner than most, and the children followed her everywhere. As our conference would not commence until evening she persuaded me to climb the hill that overlooked the village, and led me up to the spot where she had spent

many a lonely hour gazing out in the direction of civilization. It was a lovely spot, such as one might choose for a picnic in any hill station and the river could be seen in the distance and the dense plains jungle beyond.

"Happy?" she asked.

"Unbelievably so", I told her. "Do you remember that it was the jungle that we quarrelled over and now it has brought us together again?"

"Yes, but that was only because I thought you liked it better than me, and I didn't want to marry a man that I only saw for half the year."

"Ass," I replied and threatened to roll her over the edge if I heard any more nonsense.

"Anyhow, I've had my fill now and seen a side of jungle life that has sickened me." She sat up and started pulling my ears, a deplorable habit that generally meant she was embarrassed about something. "Come on, out with it," I said.

"Oh, John, I am a beast and if I had not sent you away that time then all this would never have happened. I used to sit up here sometimes and wonder if you would come for me and lose your life in that awful place." She nodded towards the country across the river and I remembered suddenly that we were occupying a vantage point that it would be a pity to waste.

I took my glasses out and followed the line of the river until it disappeared out of sight round a bend. There was nothing of interest to see and I was about to put them away when a boat appeared followed shortly afterwards by four more. The distance was too great to make out any details but they were typical country craft capable of holding ten or fifteen people each. I handed the binoculars over to Joan without comment and a frown puckered her forehead.

"Oh, John, that means trouble. Only the mountain men are allowed boats and I've never seen anything on the river before."

I wondered if they had news of my arrival or if this was the start of the long-expected attack. In any case, they were bound to hear sooner or later and I was glad of my little hide-out in the valley. It would be a good place to send Joan to when trouble really started.

The boats continued their leisurely progress down the stream but pulled into the near shore about midday and we did not see them again.

Brag lay down between us and shared our meal which was simple but good, consisting of cold fowl and sweet potatoes. Joan's housekeeping was a perpetual marvel to me as she had been brought up to a life that gave her little chance of doing anything for herself. Yet here, all alone in a jungle village, she had dug herself in comfortably, raised fowls and made not only her own butter but cream cheese into the bargain.

"Isn't she wonderful?" I asked Brag, who thumped approval with his tail and seemed to think I had asked a foolish question. We lay there all that afternoon making plans for the future and enjoying a peace such as we were not to find for many a long day.

Signs of activity in the village down below compelled us to make a move at last and we got up rather reluctantly.

"Oh John." She cried, "I love this spot. I've sat here so often wishing I had you with me and now it's all come true, let's name it."

"We will call it Dream Hill," I told her, "it's not very original but we can at least seal it with a kiss."

I took her in my arms and it had to be more than one before we could tear ourselves away from the spot. We both realised that much work had to be done that night and plans laid if we were ever to find safety again. Ranjit had arrived by the time we reached the village and also half-a-dozen leaders from the surrounding area. Leaving Joan to get our evening meal ready, I went

to the headman's hut and took my place in the little gathering. They knew all the details of Joan's escape and Ranjit told them how we had got through the tiger country and crossed the river into the bargain. He was a wily old bird and the tale lost nothing in the telling; what really shook them was the account of Lalbahadur's death. Those ungodly twins were regarded as evil spirits by these simple people and although our stock went up accordingly I think they all expected a dreadful retribution.

I think it says a lot for their courage that they were still game to come in with us. There was one other factor I have not mentioned, which I learnt from Ramlakhan. Although the village paid no tax of any kind to the mountain men, they were subjected to a traffic in women. This sort of thing gets under the skin of any race in the world and since their revolt they had been free from raids of this sort. Almost every year a village could expect to lose one of its young girls. They disappeared suddenly and never returned, some had even been torn from their lover's arms and any resistance met with death. Sometimes there had been a show of organised resistance on behalf of a bereaved lover or husband and this meant worse than death with a score of people led off to the river or beyond.

Altogether it was a mixture of new-found courage and desperation that bound these people to us and I was determined to see that they did not suffer if I could help it. After Ranjit had finished speaking, I told them of the boats I had seen coming down the river and asked the meaning of it.

They all agreed that it meant a raid but they did not think that my presence was suspected yet. This, they thought, would only be a matter of time as the country was full of spies and potential informers.

I have always believed in the principal of striking while the iron is hot and immediately put the following

proposition before them—that we should attack the party on the river while we still had the advantage of surprise. There would not be more than forty of them and if we could catch them in their boats we might do great execution. Ramlakhan and I could handle firearms and I asked for as many men as they could raise in the next few hours. They promised me fifty but nearly a hundred arrived before dark and I left half of them behind with Ranjit, whom I instructed to take Joan straight to my camp in the event of trouble. The camp could be defended at a pinch but the village would be a death trap.

It would not be necessary to leave until midnight in order to reach the river by dawn, which gave me a few hours with Joan, who hated being left behind and tried hard to make me take her. This I refused to agree to and told her that she would be far safer with Ranjit and Brag to guard her. She saw my reason, but it was silent meal as we both hated the thought of having to part even for a few hours. The drums did not do anything to cheer us up, it always annoyed me to hear those messages that one could not understand and I sent for Ramlakhan to ask what news they brought. He was away sometime and came back to say that the raiding party were announcing their arrival on the morrow and threatening death and destruction if the white woman was not produced. Nothing could be better as I now knew their intentions and had the element of surprise on my side.

At midnight we parted and I left her waving to me from the doorway of the hut, her other hand grasping Brag's collar. It gave me a feeling of confidence to see his grim outline beside her in the lighted doorway.

CHAPTER XII

OUR journey that night was uneventful and we reached the river just before dawn. It seemed hard to believe that before many hours elapsed I would have taken the first steps towards starting a war of my own. In one sense I had already started it but this was likely to be a battle on a much larger scale.

I had explained my plan to Chowry Mukir, the headman, and he offered to lead us to the most suitable spot for an ambush. I could not have wished for a better place than the one he selected as it met nearly all my requirements.

The river swept round a bend about a mile further up and then plunged into a narrow, rocky gorge. Further down there was a small, shelving beach on our side and this was the only possible landing point. If we engaged the boats in the gorge they would have the choice of carrying on or landing on the strip of beach to attack us.

There was very little time in which to make my dispositions as the craft might arrive any time after first light. I decided to put only twenty men on the gorge, with instructions to open up with their bows and arrows directly the boats entered it. With any luck the opposition would appear slight enough to tempt the mountain men to land on the beach and it was here that I placed my main body. Ramlakhan and I lay further up the gorge between the two parties and we would not use our firearms unless a landing was attempted.

It was a simple plan but the best I could devise under the circumstances as one could not take the risk of reconnoitring any further in day-light.

By five o'clock all was ready and I was pleased to see that our lads had nothing to learn of the art of camouflage. We lay expectantly behind our rifles and as the minutes went by I found myself recapturing the thrill of sitting up for one's first tiger. My reactions were much the same; wondering if the quarry would turn up and praying that everything would go according to plan.

We had not long to wait before the first boat appeared round the bend and I was glad to see the other four close behind it. Once they had entered the narrows they approached incredibly swiftly and were met with a shower of arrows from the bank. The shooting was magnificent and for a few seconds I thought it might prove a bit too good and deter them from landing. The first craft received most attention and capsized on a rock as a result of three oarsmen being hit; after that the "crocs" took a hand, and no one got ashore alive or dead.

I watched the remaining four boats with awful suspense and sighed with relief as they turned towards shore. We both opened up as they grounded and the battle was on with a vengeance. Those mountain men certainly had guts and charged up the bank in the face of a hail of arrows and a flaking fire from two sporting rifles.

So far everything had gone like clockwork and I was congratulating myself that we might get out of it without loss when my lads got tired of taking sitting shots from behind cover and entered the fray with their spears.

It was messy fighting as the mountain men fought like fiends but they never really had a chance and it was all over when I brought up our first party against their rear. Another ten minutes saw the end of it but I was

appalled by the casualties. We have eleven dead, and took two prisoners, which was all that was left of the opposition. Both sides used poisoned weapons and any kind of wound was bound to be fatal. My lads were as pleased as punch and amused themselves by doing an impromptu war dance around me, which worked them up to such a pitch that I had the very devil of a job to save our prisoners. I calmed them down after a bit and told off Ramlakhan to keep an eye on things while I examined the boats. There was nothing much of interest except a large store of rice, which must have been looted the day before. We found no firearms and it looked as if we had not been up against any of their picked men unless they had gone down with the boat that capsized. Even so it was a big victory and I did not wish to dampen the general enthusiasm. The boats might come in very useful one day and I had them pulled ashore and well hidden.

Our own dead we took back with us and the rest were thrown into the river. The crocodiles appeared to expect it of us and I hope they got indigestion! I do not know what effect the poison had on the brutes.

We were back in the village before dark and I was amazed to see that they accepted their casualties with more resignation than I did. Ranjit came out to meet us and I asked him if there was any way of persuading the aborigines to give up poisoning their weapons. He was emphatic that they would never do so and this affected my future strategy.

I now knew that I had a large following behind me but I was far from willing to lead them into a general engagement again. Joan agreed with me and I told the headman that although I counted on the full support of them all I intended to deal with the mountain men in my own way rather than cause any more bloodshed. He pretended to agree with me but failed to take me in and I guessed then that I had started something which would be very hard to control.

The drums spoke again that night and one could sense that a sterner note had crept into their beat. I realised that all secrecy had gone by the board and also that none of us would get any sleep for hours. The drum in our village sent out the glad tidings and the message was picked up all along the foot-hills. There would be peace for a few minutes until some distant village asked a question and our drum would roar into life again.

Joan and I had to shut all the doors while we fed and, as she remarked, it was difficult to hear oneself eat. By eleven o'clock our drum was silent but it did not need much perception to realise that the whole of the village was proceeding to drink itself into a frenzy on palm toddy. They eventually quietened down and I said good-night to Joan at the door of her room. The events of the day had upset her and a few minutes later I heard her calling out to me.

"John, I'm frightened. Leave the door open and stay close." I went into her room and sat on her bed until she dropped off to sleep. She had a premonition of danger that nothing I could say would disperse and in the end it affected me as well.

I have found that it is fatal to ever do the obvious if one is up against trouble in the wilds. Jungle people are cunning and clever at times but it is the cunningness of the jungle, which does not cater for the unexpected.

Everything appeared quiet and even the village was sleeping peacefully at last, everyone having succumbed to the effects of an over-dose of liquor. "What a chance it would present to an enemy," I thought—"what a chance!" It worried me but there was nothing one could do about it and I decided to bed down in a corner of the verandah instead of sleeping in the living-room.

I woke up an hour or two later and knew instinctively that all was not well. There was no sound although I strained my ears for several seconds and I was about to drop off again when I saw something move at the far end of the verandah. As my eyes became accustomed to the dark, I could make out what appeared to be a pole moving slowly towards the rush wall of Joan's room, inch by inch it crept on, and it was obvious that some human agency controlled its movements. I drew my colt automatic from its shoulder and raised it across my bent forearm. The pole ceased moving for a second or two and I thought for a moment that my presence was suspected but it was soon on the move again and I realised with a start that Joan's head lay a few inches from the inner side of the wall.

"Here goes," I thought and fired three times through the low verandah screen. The pole dropped with a thud on the floor and something floundered about outside before it also fell. Joan was out in a flash with the torch I had given her, proceeded by Brag with every hair on his back up. Ranjit and Ramlakhan arrived almost immediately and after a short search we found a man lying dead outside the hut. One bullet must have been deflected by the verandah screen but the other two had caught him below the armpit. He was a mean-looking specimen and Ranjit remembered having seen him about the village the day before.

I took the torch from Joan and walked up the verandah to find out what he had been up to with his pole. I was stooping down to pick it up when Ramlakhan gave a great cry and wrenched me backwards with sufficient force to bring me down somewhat heavily.

"What the devil?" I cried.

"Don't touch it sahib," he replied. "It contains death!"

This was no over-statement on his part as the pole proved to be hollow and contained some four feet of infuriated cobra. The snake had been tied down by the tail so that only a couple of inches of its venomous head and neck could protrude from the far end.

I have often heard of this method of carrying out a murder but had never seen it in practice. The perpetrator could carry out his ghastly deed with little chance of detection. And it would only be necessary to push the pole through the wall of a hut until it rested near a sleeping person. The cobra would do the rest and a man carrying a stick across his shoulder is too common a sight in India to warrant suspicion.

Joan was deathly white and I decided to move her to my camp first thing next day. There could be no safety in a village and even my shots had failed to rouse anyone except two faithful servants.

CHAPTER XIII

LACK of sleep and worry had not improved my temper by the next morning and I was still further enraged to find both the prisoners dead. Everyone expressed polite regret but seemed surprised that I should be concerned over so small a matter. On the other hand they were greatly incensed about the attempt on Joan's life and appeared to think that the man must have been an informer as he had only been in the village a short time. Such strangers frequently arrived and although they were far from welcome it was considered the best policy to leave them severely alone.

I could not for the life of me imagine why the attempt had been made on Joan's life instead of mine but I was determined to get her out of it that day although I would have to return myself. The snake episode had shaken her severely, poor child, and she agreed at once that we should move straight away. I left Ramlakhan behind to keep an eye on things and we set out with Ranjit and my own porters. The boy, Khaiza, wanted to come with us but I decided that it would be best to leave him behind with Ramlakhan.

We took things easily and made no attempt to do the trip in one day as I did not wish to tire Joan out and wanted to spend as much time with her as possible. I realised that I would have to leave her at times but considered that she would be far safer in camp with my own porters, who were trustworthy and as staunch as steel now that they knew what they were up against. They would be armed, as I had collected much of the spoils of war after our battle on the river and every man would have a bow, a weapon that is much underrated

these days. The bow used in this part of the world is superior to any that I have seen and capable of very accurate shooting at ranges of well over a hundred yards. Poison I would not permit at any price and the very thought of it turned me cold.

Our journey was uneventful and we arrived in camp early on the following day. The boys were over-joyed to see us and clamoured for news as they had heard the drums and guessed that something was in the wind.

I spent the rest of the day exploring the whole area with Ranjit and arranging for its defence. The place was a natural stronghold and Ranjit was convinced that they would be safe enough in any case as it was well off the beaten track. We started on Lalbahadur's supplies that night and dined remarkably well although it was a sad meal as I had to be off next morning. Joan had tasted no English food for months and you can imagine that she found it remarkably good. Lalbahadur must have been taking it up for Carlos and Barbara when he met his death and I wondered what arrangement the brothers maintained for communicating with the outside world. They must have some sort of agency in Pindu and I hoped that George Travers would not fall foul of them if he came to look for us when the four weeks had elapsed. I should be clear of the place by then but would by no means be sure of it as I had as yet no definite plan. Whatever I decided to do it was bound to be hazardous and I had no intention of upsetting Joan by speculating on the subject at this stage.

We parted at dawn next day and I slipped off alone on the return trip to the village, which I hoped to reach before dark. All went well until the afternoon when I heard the cry of a night jar and wondered why on earth these people should give themselves away by using such a call by day. Later on I learnt that it was used as a pass word by the mountain men and their agents and was calculated to strike terror into the hearts of anyone hearing it. I froze immediately and a few seconds later heard the answering call.

CHAPTER XIII

LACK of sleep and worry had not improved my temper by the next morning and I was still further enraged to find both the prisoners dead. Everyone expressed polite regret but seemed surprised that I should be concerned over so small a matter. On the other hand they were greatly incensed about the attempt on Joan's life and appeared to think that the man must have been an informer as he had only been in the village a short time. Such strangers frequently arrived and although they were far from welcome it was considered the best policy to leave them severely alone.

I could not for the life of me imagine why the attempt had been made on Joan's life instead of mine but I was determined to get her out of it that day although I would have to return myself. The snake episode had shaken her severely, poor child, and she agreed at once that we should move straight away. I left Ramlakhan behind to keep an eye on things and we set out with Ranjit and my own porters. The boy, Khaita, wanted to come with us but I decided that it would be best to leave him behind with Ramlakhan.

We took things easily and made no attempt to do the trip in one day as I did not wish to tire Joan out and wanted to spend as much time with her as possible. I realised that I would have to leave her at times but considered that she would be far safer in camp with my own porters, who were trustworthy and as staunch as steel now that they knew what they were up against. They would be armed, as I had collected much of the spoils of war after our battle on the river and every man would have a bow, a weapon that is much underrated

these days. The bow used in this part of the world is superior to any that I have seen and capable of very accurate shooting at ranges of well over a hundred yards. Poison I would not permit at any price and the very thought of it turned me cold.

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I had been travelling of all beaten tracks but recollected that I must be in the neighbourhood of a path that led in the direction of the mountain. Our party had crossed it much lower down as I had chosen easier going for Joan's benefit.

I could not afford to miss the opportunity of investigating anything of interest and moved on with infinite caution until I could overlook the path. I had only a few minutes to wait before one of the men came in sight and I watched him as he stopped to give his peculiar call. He did not move on and was presently answered by the second man, who arrived shortly afterwards, from the direction of the village I was making for. They started to confer excitedly and I watched in some trepidation as they might come across our tracks leading to my camp if they went any further. If this happened, I would have to take drastic action and I was most anxious to avoid shedding any more blood.

They were too far off for me to catch more than the odd word here and there but I gathered that the second man had been spying out the land and had received confirmation of my arrival and the battle on the river. This would be known to the whole district anyhow but I expect Carlos wanted further details.

They finally moved off together towards the hills, much to my relief, and I decided to follow them for an hour or two. One of the few accomplishments I have acquired from an otherwise misspent youth is the ability to meet the native tracker on his own ground and I had no difficulty in following the two men without giving myself away. They made my task much easier by talking incessantly and both appeared to have the wind up.

The mountain men must have known by now that I was the cause of Lalbahadur's death and the subsequent battle and it struck me then that much might be accomplished if we could spread some more alarm and despondency. If I had done nothing else I had at least

exploded the myth of the twins invincibility but, although I did not realise it at the time, I was already making the fatal error of underrating my opponent.

The track led straight towards the mountain and struck directly across the valleys between the foot-hills. The going was hard and I felt myself tiring; one needs to be superlatively fit for this sort of work and I had started the expedition almost from the doors of a hospital. Shortly before dusk, they paused to look round and then stepped off with infinite caution along a small valley. I guessed that this must lead to one of the lesser-known entries to the plateau and memorized it for future reference. I could see no point in following them any further and bedded down further back off the main track.

I hoped my discovery might prove of value later on as it had delayed me a further day in reaching the village and I would in consequence have nothing further to eat until I arrived there.

I slept well enough but was disturbed several times in the night by people passing, a sure sign that Carlos was not going to let the grass grow under his feet. All activity ceased before dawn and I reached the village, very tired and hungry, shortly after midday.

They were relieved to see me, and I knew at once that Ramlakhan had something to tell me. There was much to discuss with the headman, who had been raising most of the foot-hills in arms, and had news of two mountain men being caught. I was badly in need of prisoners to question and was disappointed to learn that both had been despatched.

It was sometime before I could get a moment alone with Ramlakhan in the hut where he handed me a letter addressed to Joan, I tore open the envelope and read the contents eagerly. This is how it ran—

Dear Joan,

I guess I've been a swab but I must get out of this. I'm going to make a break on Thursday by the road you took. Send Ramlakhan to meet me up on the mountain track.

Love

BABS.

I read it through twice and wondered what this would lead to. There was no mention of the messenger and I asked Ramlakhan who had brought it. He knew no more than I did and had found it on the table that morning.

Today was Monday and I determined to go to the rendezvous myself. Ramlakhan said he could remember the way and that we might just make it in time if we started next morning and travelled fast.

He had no other news except that Khaita had vanished but he did not think this of much importance as the boy had not seemed too comfortable in a strange village. I had had the foresight to leave one of the ponies with Ramlakhan and would ride it on the morrow as the leg which had been injured, was starting to give way under the tremendous strain of the last few days.

We spent the afternoon arranging supplies for the journey and told the headman that we were going to explore the mountain without mentioning Barbara Eve's letter.

CHAPTER XIV

I SET out next morning with some very mixed feelings and a leg that was causing me great pain. I was intensely interested to meet Barbara Eve again as it is not often that one finds the daughter of an American millionaire falling for a bandit of mixed blood. I wondered what effect her experiences would have on her future life and what on earth we would do with her until we got out of the place. Carlos was another problem as there must be something in a person who had kept this show going all these years and finally captivated a girl who considered the average man beneath her notice. Joan had considered Carlos to be largely hot air and thought that Barbara had already found this out during the first few days. This might be so but I think her opinion was partly based on her own intense dislike of the man and she had not taken into consideration that he had had no intercourse with a European since the age of fifteen. The fact that he was a blood relation of mine I tried not to contemplate, as my sole object was to destroy him and bring the whole beastly regime to an end. It was a great piece of luck that I had got Lalbahadur, who, although the weaker character, obviously carried much more affection with their followers as he had been brought up as one of them and married into the country.

These thoughts occupied my mind during the greater part of the journey, which was without incident. We ran into a herd of cheetal on the evening of the first day and I stalked them as best I could until I was forced to take a long shot with the Mannlicher. I singled out a young stag and dropped him, which sent

the herd off at a gallop until they stopped again some seven hundred yards off. They were obviously unaccustomed to firearms and wondered what it was all about.

I have long ago given up shooting deer unless I strike something exceptional but decided to try another shot in order to keep my eye in, although shooting at such a range would never be justified by a sportsman. The leader of the herd was an obvious choice as he stood out away from the rest, ready to lead them off again if he thought it necessary. I took a long and careful aim and brought him down on his knees but he was up again in a flash and I finished him with my second shot.

I might be lame but I had the consolation of knowing that I could still shoot straight and rode over to look at him while Ramlakhan cut up the first beast. The old stag carried a very fine head, better than I have ever shot, but I felt a pang of regret as I gazed down at him and realised that my shooting days were over. I think most big game hunters, who have done a lot of it, experience this feeling sooner or later. The obvious answer is either to retire and write a book, of which there are already too many, or take up photography. I had decided to adopt the latter course a year ago and it was all the more irritating to find that I was now engaged in man-hunting as a career.

Ramlakhan was a first-class cook and we dined royally on roast venison, after which I split the night into two watches and we slept undisturbed.

We reached the foot of the mountain next day and I told Ramlakhan to remain down below with the pony while I climbed up the path as best I could. Recent events had made me suspicious of everything and it had struck me during the march that I did not know Barbara Eve's handwriting! It was a disconcerting thought and if there was a trap set for us there was no

point in our both running into it and I did not feel justified in sending Ramlakhan up alone.

If the letter was genuine I had nothing to fear but if it was faked then it was obviously set for me, and trouble, if it came, would be serious. Carlos might easily have known that Joan had been sent away and that the letter must find me on my return. I blamed myself for not having thought of the possibility before and started my climb in a furious temper as my own stupidity might jeopardise everything.

The leg gave me unadulterated hell but was the cause of saving my life. The trail was easy to recognise and I eventually reached the land-slide where Joan had been attacked during her escape. There was no sign of life and I started to make the crossing, which was difficult enough without a game leg. I was half way across when I wrenched my leg and took a header down the Khud. One does not think of much on such an occasion but there was no mistaking the whine of a bullet ricocheting off rock. I fell or rolled about twenty feet but had my fall broken by a thick bush growing out from a fissure.

It took me several seconds to pull myself together and my first thought was the rifle, which, to my relief, I found unharmed. The bush afforded excellent cover and raising myself inch by inch, I was able to look up the hill without being seen. Three men with rifles were standing together on a small ledge and I instantly recognised Carlos who was the split image of his brother.

I lifted the rifle slowly to my shoulder until he stood out clearly in the telescopic sight. "Here's one for you," I muttered and squeezed the trigger gently. I was still pretty shaky and the bullet struck the man on his right, who came down the slide like a sack of potatoes and passed me to fall with a sickening thud far below.

The other two wasted no time in removing themselves into cover and each made for opposite sides of the slide, which meant that I now had two places to watch.

First round to me; but there was no future in trying to cope with two men in cover from an exposed position and I looked like dying like a rat in a trap.

Nothing happened for five minutes and I settled myself well down in the crevice, which was just as well as they started bombarding the bush and kept it up for some time. They gave up eventually and I guessed that they were moving down the hill to find a more vulnerable spot in my hide-out.

Time was on their side and I realised that even darkness would not aid me in my present position.

It was with the idea of drawing their fire and finding out their new positions that I tried the old dodge of exposing my topi for a few seconds. I tilted it back as I raised it to make it seem as realistic as possible but was not prepared for the success I achieved. A bullet ripped through it and a moment later Carlos stepped out from cover and waved to the man across the way. Had I been ready I could not have missed him but he saw a movement and leapt behind a tree before I could fire. I cursed myself for a fool and kept the tree well covered. It was barely thick enough to conceal him and any move would expose him. The situation was not without humour and I waited expectantly until he leapt back towards the cover behind him. He only gave me the chance for a snap shot but I saw him stumble from the effect of a broken left arm. He was out of sight before I could get in another but the situation was definitely levelling up in my favour and I felt considerably better.

Carlos would not be likely to trouble me any further that day and I shifted round to try and locate the remaining man. This was nearly the cause of my un-

doing, and drew a couple of shots, one of which creased my shoulder like a red-hot poker. A tell-tale whisp of smoke from between the two boulders gave his position away and we settled down to an interminable duel that got neither of us anywhere.

There was little to choose between our relative positions except that I could not move without exposing myself.

An hour passed and then another until the rock I was lying on began to get unpleasantly warm from the sun. I had given up expending ammunition but the man above me fired regularly every ten minutes or so; most of his shots were ineffective but a ricochet struck the heel of my boot and tore it clean off. This gave me an idea and I examined his position in a new light until I saw what I was looking for. Somewhat to his left lay a small slanting piece of rock and I opened up on this with the Mannlicher until I got the range nicely and every shot produced a ricochet that left nothing to be desired. I was using split-nosed bullets and he must have had a pretty uncomfortable time until he eventually exposed a portion of woolly head and that was the end.

I made no move for half an hour and presently heard a most welcome sound in Ramlakhan's voice calling to me. He helped me out of my position and I made the trip across the slide successfully. Further climbing was beyond my capabilities and I sent him up to look at the dead man while I bound up the graze on my shoulder. He brought back my late opponent's rifle and ammunition, which I was not disposed to leave about, and then went back to see if he could find any trace of Carlos while I rested with my back against a tree. He returned an hour or two later to report that our customer had got clean away but must have lost a lot of blood.

It was impossible for me to walk unaided in my present condition and he helped me on the return

journey down the mountain. We passed the first man I had killed lying crumpled up several hundred feet further down and reached the pony late in the afternoon.

I had hoped to call in on Joan before returning to the village but the drums were very active that night and Ramlakhan thought it might be advisable to return as soon as possible. Actually it took us nearly three days and I was pretty well all in when we got back.

There had been a major clash since our absence, between the villages in revolt and those near the ford who still remained loyal to the mountain men. The action had been indecisive but had resulted in several more villages joining the revolt. Chowry Mukir told us that, except for the three villages that adjoined the ford, we now had all the people of the foothills with us.

When I told them of my adventure on the mountain it caused an enormous sensation and they begged me to lead them in an attack on the ford. The idea appealed to me as it would cut off our opponents from the river and, if successful, would eliminate the post of picked men that guarded it night and day. I was too tired to do much about it that night but promised to think it over.

CHAPTER XV

I SLEPT on their suggestion that night and decided that it was worth trying, which was going against my resolution not to lead them into another open engagement. On the other hand, the advantages would be enormous and if it came off I could sit back and wait until Travers brought relief. I also wished to exploit the period in which Carlos was laid up with his wounded arm.

The next few days were spent in making preparations and the little village gradually came to resemble an armed camp as volunteers flocked in to join us. During those days, I received frequent letters from Joan and despatched a contingent of fifty men to guard her. They were very disappointed at having to miss the fun but such was their esteem for her that I do not think one of them grudged the duty.

I needed three hundred men for the job as a larger number would have been unwieldy and quite impossible to handle. It was obvious from the start that many more would volunteer and at the end of the week the figure was nearly eight hundred. Ramlakhan advised me that it would be fatal to refuse their services so we sent them out in batches to watch various approaches from the mountain and other odd patrol activities which kept them happy enough.

Ramlakhan organised a very fine intelligence service by sending spies to the ford and utilized a series of runners in relays, who brought news back incredibly quickly. By this means, we learnt that the three remaining villages were already wavering and disliked

the idea of being caught between two fires. We also heard that the mountain men had about forty men on the ford guarding the crossing and the main approach to their mountain fastness.

I still did not feel fit enough to take the road myself but thought it worth while sending out a force to make a demonstration against the villages; with strict instructions not to get involved with the mountain men. Our village headman, Chowry Mukir, had emerged as the leading light in the revolt and he was the obvious man to lead the show. I had presented him with the captured rifle and taught him how to use it and this act had bound him to me for life and raised his standing considerably in the eyes of his followers.

He departed early one morning with over fifty men and a few nights later the drums were sending back news of his exploits. He had wisely decided to deal with one village at a time and carried fire and sword into the first one to such an extent that the other two came over to us in force the next day. Such was their fear of the mountain men that they evacuated their villages and started to stream back with their wives and children and most of their worldly possessions. I knew that Chowry Mukir would not hurry himself returning and rode over to see Joan in the interval.

She had not expected to see me and literally fell into my arms when I tapped on the screen outside her tent.

"Oh Darling, Darling, how marvellous," she cried. I held her out at arm's length and what I saw was good.

"I think I'm the luckiest man alive," I told her and kissed her upturned mouth.

I could only afford to spend one day there and we made the best of it. Ranjit was happy enough but looked very much older and I think he was beginning to feel the strain. He had heard the latest news, as

the men I had sent over included a drummer who could pick up and relay news, but thought that we would have a tough job to clear up the business. I was inclined to agree with him but was not going to spoil my day with Joan by getting depressed.

I told her of my encounter with Carlos and she seemed to think that it would injure his self esteem and drive him to any lengths to get even with me. I would have thought that the man had cause enough to hate me already but I still had much to learn before I got an insight into that extraordinary character. Joan was of the opinion that he would infinitely rather see his whole kingdom go up in flames than be worsted in a personal encounter.

My visit passed all too quickly and I left early next morning and could not help noticing the changed atmosphere in all the villages we passed through. My arrival in their domain might have caused bloodshed but it was well justified if only I could free these people from their bondage.

We reached the village before Chowry Mukir, who was not expected until the next day, and I told Ram-lakhan that I wished to summon a meeting of all the headmen in the foo-thills. He raised his eyebrows at this and asked me what I had in mind but I was determined to keep my own council and told him to carry out my instructions. It took three days to get them all together and I realised that I could not have chosen a better time for my purpose.

I stood up within that circle of warriors and laid my ultimatum before them. I told them straight, without beating about the bush, that they must from this moment give up the use of all poisoned weapons. If they did this then I was prepared to lead them personally in an attack on the ford. The choice was theirs and I explained that failure to carry out my wishes would mean that I would abandon them to their fate and depart the way I had come.

The suggestion struck them like a thunderbolt and I was glad that I had not said a word about it before. If they refused, I would be in a very awkward position but I considered it to be well worth the attempt.

If they had the opportunity to gossip about it beforehand they would merely have laughed me to scorn but the sudden ultimatum following their first successful campaign made them think. At first there was a horrified silence, until Chowry Mukir rose to speak and every eye was turned on him expectantly.

He made an extremely good speech when one considers that he was little more than an illiterate savage and I give it to you in his own words.

"The white man has given us a hard choice," he told them. "It has always been the custom of our people to use such weapons and no doubt our enemies will continue to do so,"—a chorus of appreciative grunts met this statement and he paused for a few seconds before continuing.

"Before the arrival of the white-man we lived in great terror and never knew when our womenfolk might be taken from us. Since the coming of the white-man we have become a free people which none of us have ever deemed possible. If the white-man considers that we can complete the destruction of our enemies without the use of poison in our weapons, then I, for one, am prepared to follow him. Every man here owes a great debt to our leader and is this a great thing that he asks of us in repayment?"

I had expected nothing like this and I don't think the others had either. He had put it in such a way that everyone considered himself under an obligation to me and they agreed at once without a single dissentient voice.

Even Ramlakhan was taken by surprise and I heard him mutter "Shabash,* Sahib," under his breath.

* Well done.

I got the drummer to send the glad news to Joan that night and she sent a personal message back to Chowry Mukir which pleased him no end and I heard him repeating it to the other headmen, who were staying the night in the village before going back to their respective posts.

I felt a new man and set about our preparations with a will; after that news came in regularly and we learnt that the mountain men had reinforced their post on the ford, which now contained nearly a hundred men. They were expected to make some move soon and had already burnt the three evacuated villages.

CHAPTER XVI

I AM no student of military affairs but I knew enough about the subject to realise that surprise was an essential to aim at. I sent Chowry Mukir on ahead to play about in the surrounding area and gather what information he could while I came on behind with the main body.

I had previously sent back to camp for two of my porters who could use firearms and this gave us five rifles; I wished we had many more.

We met with no trouble on our approach march, but picked up a couple of hundred unwelcome volunteers who flatly refused to miss the fun. The last thing I wanted to do was to involve such a large force before I knew the strength of the opposition, so I halted them when we were ten miles from the ford and left them with Ramlakhan.

I went on alone and joined up with Chowry Mukir; he had already been in action and had succeeded in ambushing a couple of men on their way down to the river for water. He had tried the same thing next day and got in the neck rather badly as they caught him with long range rifle fire. One of his men had been killed outright and five more wounded before they got out of it.

The mountain men had placed four men with rifles in a small sangar near the ford but the majority of their force were camped further up the pass. He offered to take me there and I jumped at the opportunity of seeing things for myself.

We avoided the obvious approach by the river and crept along the first of the series of foot-hills until we reached a place from which we could overlook the little fort below. The sight that met our eyes was almost too good to be true as we could see the four men with their rifles less than five hundred yards below us.

I could hardly restrain Chowry Mukir from emptying his own into them and I think he regretted not having found this vantage point before. We crawled on further until we found ourselves above the main track itself and could hear the sound of voices round the bend. Someone passed below carrying a couple of baskets on a pole slung over his shoulders and was obviously taking supplies to the sangar. We crept back on our tracks and I asked Chowry Mukir if there was any way we could get astride the track behind them. He told me that it should be possible as he knew something of the geography of the place, having visited the plateau in his capacity of headman to a village.

He led me back some distance and we then struck inland until we reached a valley that led us straight to the hill road. The valley was choked with undergrowth and even a large force would be able to reach the track without being seen.

We had located the main party of the enemy and as it would have been tempting providence to explore any further we turned back and reached camp late in the morning.

The plan of action was obvious and I explained my idea to Chowry Mukir on the way back. Ramlakhan and I would occupy the point that overlooked the sangar and deal with the occupants with our rifles while he brought up the rest of our force onto the track behind the mountain men. There was only one snag, and that was the time factor, as it was essential to carry out our project at first light and Chowry Mukir would

have to travel back ten miles and bring up our force in time to attack before dawn.

Speed was essential as the mountain men still had spies in the place and might easily massacre the lot of us if they got wind of the expedition. There were other ways down the mountain and twenty men with modern weapons could cause absolute havoc. Everything depended on perfect timing and I agreed to Chowry Mukir's suggestion that I should take his original party with me in case he was delayed.

He left immediately and Ramlakhan fetched up at four o'clock in the morning with the news that Chowry Mukir had got our forces on the move and left at the same time as he had. Ramlakhan had run most of the way, but I could not afford to let him rest and gave the order to march immediately.

We reached our objective shortly before dawn and lay there watching the world around us gradually lighting up. There was no means of knowing if Chowry Mukir's men were in position but I could not afford to wait and would have to start our show the moment it was light enough to shoot. We must capture the sangar as without the shelter it afforded we might be in a very sticky position.

Soon we could make out its outline and I strained my eyes to count the occupants; after that it seemed only a matter of seconds before it was full daylight and to my horror I saw ten men in the sangar and six of them had rifles.

It looked as if the enemy had some suspicion of our intentions but there was nothing else for it, so we opened up and each poured in a magazine full.

We caught the whole party completely by surprise but we only knocked over three of the rifle men and the rest dived under the walls for protection.

There was no point in waiting now and I blessed Chowry Mukir for his foresight as I waved his men

down the hill. They rose in a body and went in at the rate of knots but one cannot charge in the face of rifle fire without casualties and they dropped eight of my lads before they reached the walls.

My leg precluded me from being in the front rank but it was all over by the time I got there and another three good men had seen the last of their hunting days.

The sangar had been built entirely as a defence against anyone crossing the ford and had certainly not been designed for an attack from the hills. It could contain a large force and I set the whole party at work raising the inner walls. A lot of confused shouting was going on up the track, but this was obviously not caused by our main body and few minutes later a dozen mountain men appeared round the bend and retired again at their leisure. Apparently they thought the sangar had been rushed by locals and imagined the rifle fire had come from their own party before it was overwhelmed.

Nothing happened for ten minutes when over forty of them charged out and came straight for us. I let them have a bit of law before firing, in order not to put them off, but this was a mistake. They fanned out and when we did open up they offered a very dispersed target. My own bowmen really broke up the attack but even so it was touch and go and six of the devils got over the wall. I shot two with my automatic and the rest were speared, an extremely messy business.

We had beaten them off without loss to ourselves but a lot had got away and we would be sunk if help did not arrive soon. There was still no sign of Chowry Mukir's attack, and a few minutes later we were being fired at from our own starting point.

As long as we lay well in against the wall we were sufficiently protected but it left us ill prepared against a second attack. There were three rifles firing at us and it was a long time before I could find anything in

the nature of a loop-hole from which to answer them. One of them was using an old black powder rifle and I got him by firing into the smoke. The others had modern weapons and a bullet came through my loop-hole that nearly blinded me with splinters. I could see nothing for several minutes and told Ramlakhan not to use it as they obviously had it covered.

There was nothing else we could do except pray that they would not launch another attack before our own materialised. One of the lads at the far eastern corner called to me and I crawled over to see what he wanted. He had found a crack in the wall and told me to look through it; at first I could see nothing but presently noticed a movement in the undergrowth and realised that an assault on our flank was imminent.

It had been launched before I could move anyone over to meet it but they heard me fire and rushed over to help me stem the tide. There was no time to stop them this time and they surged up to the sangar wall to become engaged in a desperate hand to hand struggle. Our numbers were almost equal but the two riflemen on the hill were taking a steady toll of our people when they got a chance of firing without hitting any of their own men.

This was roughly the situation when I noticed another party emerge from the road and realised that the mountain men were still in sufficient strength to put in a frontal attack where we had nothing with which to meet it. Ramlakhan was embroiled in the general scrimmage and I swung up my rifle, determined to do as much execution as possible before the inevitable end. I had hardly got the butt to my shoulder before they turned about and I saw that Chowry Mukir had made it in the nick of time.

The villagers poured down the road like an avalanche and I do not think a single living soul escaped them. By this time, the flank attack had broken well into our sangar but they were caught between two fires

and never stood an earthly chance. Even the riflemen were accounted for by my porters who had been left with the main body, and settled them with a dose of buck shot as they fled towards the mountain.

We called it the "Battle of the Ford" and, considering the numbers involved, I think it justified the title. Chowry Mukir almost wept to find me safe and swore that he would have killed himself had they arrived too late to save us. He had moved his force up at an incredible speed but had bumped into another party of mountain men who were coming down to reinforce their garrison. There was no doubt that they had got wind of our approach and I reckoned that we must have killed off nearly a quarter of Carlos' available men.

Chowry Mukir's lads were all for moving up the track for a direct attack on the plateau but this I would not allow at any price. I had never seen it myself but from Joan's account it would be an absolute death-trap, and a few men with rifles could hold it against an army.

The sangar I was determined to keep at all costs and we spent the rest of the day in altering the defences to stand against an attack from the hills. I had told George Travers to come and look for me after four weeks but knowing him I expected that he had already started and he had sufficient information to be able to ignore the danger from Golcooda tigers.

The obvious course was to bring Joan up and defend the sangar until help arrived, which would not have been difficult with the force at my disposal.

I had left the men to get on with the work and wandered down to inspect the ford when I heard a shout from Ramlakhan, who came running towards me. "Sahib, Sahib," he cried. "They have taken Joan Miss Sahib." The news had just come through on the drums and I think that was the cruelest blow that fate has ever struck me.

CHAPTER XVII

THESE evil tidings had much the same effect on the others and headman after headman came up to offer his life in any plan I might decide on for her rescue.

I tried to get further news and word came back from Ranjit that there was a letter for me. It was impossible to make head or tail of this and I decided to go ahead as fast as I could and leave Chowry Mukir to follow with a couple of hundred men. Ramlakhan had to remain at the ford as he would be the only person capable of explaining things to Travers when he arrived. He would have three hundred picked men under him and before I left I arranged that the defence of the ford would be partly based on the foot-hill and not only on the sangar, which would otherwise become a death-trap. Having arranged this to my own satisfaction, I set out on one of the ponies and was too desperately consumed with worry to remember a single thing about the journey.

It was early on the third day that I arrived in camp. Ranjit ran out to meet me and there were tears in the old man's eyes as he told me his tale.

Joan had climbed the opposite hill as was her usual custom, except that she had left Brag in camp as he had a swollen paw caused by a thorn. That was the last they had seen of her and Ranjit thought she must have been captured at least two hours before her disappearance was noticed. There had been a cordon of guards all round the camp but her captors had eluded them all and come and gone without leaving any trace.

Ranjit had immediately sent a message to me and then set out with a rescue party and endeavoured to follow the trail but without success. It was a repetition of the episode in his youth and although he kept at it all day he learnt nothing as her abductors had removed all trace of their progress with consummate skill.

Brag might have aided them but he was too lame to walk and they had been unable to use him.

The next day, Khaita had walked into the camp as bold as brass carrying a letter for me. It was obvious that he knew something but he refused to divulge any information and seemed very pleased with himself according to Ranjit. The rest of the story was all very confused and I did not press for details over which it was obviously better to draw a veil.

The boy apparently thought his protector now had the whip hand over us and that he therefore had nothing to fear. This attitude so infuriated the guard, who felt themselves largely to blame for Joan's disappearance, that they took him off and extracted information in their own manner.

He admitted that he had gone up to the mountain, and told them that three of the cleverest trackers had been sent down with instructions to secure Joan at any cost. They had come by a secret path which was only used by the special agents who were sent into the foot-hills from time to time. The boy had offered to lead them to this path but had unfortunately died of fright or so they said!

I did not feel it in my heart to blame anyone and took the letter which Ranjit handed over to me. It was written in the same handwriting as before but this time was signed with my own surname prefixed by the word 'Carlos'. He did not mince matters and I give you the letter as he wrote it.

My Friend,

You have been foolish enough to cross my path and now you will perhaps realise who is the cleverest of us two?

You and I have a little matter to settle between us and I request you to come and visit me.

This invitation is intended for you alone and if a single soul comes here with you then the admirable Miss Joan must go to the tigers. I hope such a course will not be necessary as it will give me great pleasure to entertain her here indefinitely.

Yours truly,

Carlos Stanton.

You can imagine my rage as I read it; the implication was plain enough and I had every intention of accepting the hospitality he offered.

There was only one thing in my favour and that was the fact that I had already seen the secret path and would have no difficulty in finding it. Carlos would be expecting me by the same road that I had taken before; this I was convinced of in spite of the fact that the boy also knew the existence of the other path. Carlos had used him and if my own men had not taken the law into their hands there was no doubt that the boy would have died just the same.

I explained the contents of the letter to Ranjit and told him that I had no choice but to go alone, except that Brag would accompany me. He was to return with the rest of the party to the ford, explain things to Chowry Mukir, and await the arrival of Travers.

I wrote a brief letter, which I gave to Ranjit, explaining the position and hoping that I would live

to see him. There was nothing else I could do and Travers must take whatever action he thought fit.

I took nothing but my rifle and the automatic, with sufficient food for the trip to the mountain. Brag was completely cured of his bad foot and I think the old hound knew what was expected of him.

We reached the place where I had last seen the two men I had followed and had no difficulty in finding the path. It had obviously been made recently and had probably been built after the landslide which had destroyed the other tracks. They had all wound up the side of the mountain in order to secure an easy gradient but this one went almost straight up and for the most part consisted of steps cut into the rock.

It was a terrible climb for both of us and I was glad to reach a ledge where we could stop and take a breather. Brag lay down on his side panting dreadfully but was soon up again and showing signs of great excitement.

If Joan had come this way they must have rested here and presently I found my name scrawled against the mossy side of the rock. "Oh, Joan," I cried and pressed my lips against its rugged surface. A growl from Brag brought me to my senses and I heard the sounds of someone descending the path. I drew my pistol in a flash but promptly transferred it to my left hand and seized a rock in my right. If he stopped to rest on the ledge I would have no choice but to fire and I prayed that he would pass me. Whatever he did I must kill him as he would see my tracks and I could afford to let nothing jeopardise my chances. He passed straight on and I flung the rock at him; it caught him squarely between the shoulders and sent him head first down the almost perpendicular track. It was more a staircase than a path and the poor wretch must have smashed every bone in his body before he reached the bottom.

We met no one else and eventually reached the top after halts that became more and more frequent. I expected to find a guard there and was not far wrong but he was hardly a guard in so much as he was fast asleep. I did not want yet another death on my hands and kept him covered as we crept past him. In any case, I could not afford to fire and I doubted if he would mention our arrival if he noticed the tracks; there would not be much future for a sentry who neglected his duty in this place!

We reached the plateau in the early afternoon and the beauty of the place was amazing, it might almost have been a piece of English downland.

It would not do to move during daylight and I found a convenient hollow where Brag and I could rest and snatched a few hours' sleep confident that he would sound the alarm if anyone approached.

I woke at dusk but waited a few hours until the moon was up before starting to explore the plateau in detail. The roar of a tiger led me to what was obviously Lalbahadur's zoo and even if we had not heard the beasts the smell was sufficient advertisement in itself.

But then I had a half-formed plan in my mind and spent nearly an hour exploring the place. The stockade could not have kept a normal tiger in, so it was a safe bet that these were the 'home-made' variety. The whole place covered several acres and I presently found the gate, a simple affair, and closed with a strong wooden bar. I could only guess at the number of tigers it contained but reckoned that there must have been well over a dozen of the brutes in it.

Joan had described the plateau minutely and I had no difficulty in finding the bungalow, which was all lighted up, and doubtless very well guarded.

I had to dispose of Brag first and this was where his training came in most useful as he had been taught

to guard any object that he was put in charge of. I removed my coat and left him with it under a lone tree that was an obvious landmark and easy to pick up at night.

The poor old boy hated to see me leave but realised at once that orders had to be obeyed. I could see him standing there as I walked away but he made no attempt to follow me.

The guards round the house gave me no trouble and I avoided them easily until I reached a place in the compound, from where I could look into the main room of the house.

There were two women in the room and one of them was Joan who was weeping into a handkerchief. The other appeared to be a native of the country and was clad in nothing but a leopard skin with her long hair falling over her shoulders. Carlos was either out or in some other part of the house, so I acted on impulse and stepped through the open window. Joan rose to her feet when she saw me and then collapsed on the floor in a faint. The woman who ran to her assistance was none other than Barbara Eve.....!

CHAPTER XVIII

WE carried Joan over to the sofa together.

"What have you done with Carlos?" were Barbara Eve's words.

"Nothing," I replied. "Why should you ask?"

"Well, he's sitting up for you on the trail with a crowd that know how to shoot and we did not expect to see you any more."

I explained to her how I had come up by the secret path and while we were talking Joan came to me and drew my head down to her breast.

"Is it really you?" she asked. "I thought I'd seen a ghost and I guess it shook me."

I reassured her as best as I could but kept one eye on Barbara as I did not quite see how she came into the picture. "When do you expect Carlos back?" I asked her and she told me that he would wait on the trail until dawn when he would return and leave the others on guard if I had not turned up.

"And you?" I asked "I have taken some chances that I do not mean to repeat and I intend to get Joan out for good this time; if you are with us then say so and we will not waste time."

She took a long time before she answered and then shook her head slowly.

"I am and I'm not," was her reply. "I hate that man but I love him too and I cannot go with you."

I'll help you all I can but I am here for better or for worse and I guess I'll see it through to the end. See?"

I did not see but grasped her outstretched hand and realised that there was something great in that woman. She had got into a show that was too big for her but she was not going to crawl to anyone. She fetched me some food and listened while I outlined my plan.

The chances of getting down again were remote at present as Joan was in no condition to tackle those steps and I was equally sure that my own leg would not stand it. Climbing up had been damned awful but going down would be down-right dangerous even for a fit man and it was quite on the cards that we might have to move quickly, into the bargain. What I intended to do was to turn the zoo loose and rely on Brag to save us. It might be a horrible plan but it was one way of clearing up the place. She turned pale when she heard it but did not have time to say anything. We heard a shout outside and the unmistakable sound of Carlos' voice asking a question of the guard.

"Quick," she cried, "out of it and good luck. I'll tell him that Joan has gone to bed."

We slipped through the window and heard a lot of angry shouting but no sign of a pursuit. Someone must have found the dead man on the steps and brought the glad news to Carlos that I was up on the plateau.

I led Joan straight to the tree and we found Brag exactly as I had left him. He had not moved and must have remained in the same position during the two hours I had been away. He was definitely pleased to see Joan but seemed very tired, which confirmed a suspicion I had felt for some time. I had a length of rope with me that I always carried round my waist in the hills and I told Joan to tie him to her as the cage business was likely to be tricky.

We made for the zoo and I found the door all right but there were a couple of tigers close to it, on the

inside, and I had to bring Brag up to scare them off. The bar was heavy but I got it off at last and we slipped away as quickly as we could to the other side, where I heaved a few stones over and started the occupants moving about.

We found the quarry next and Joan pointed out the sheds where the gold was stored and it was here that we ran into trouble in the shape of a man with a rifle. He saw us but ran off shouting to raise his pals instead of doing anything about it, and gave us the chance of getting out into the country again. Joan had never been further than this but suggested we carried on to the end of the plateau where the main mountain mass bounded it on the far side.

No one followed us but a drum started beating like mad which Joan said was the signal for an escaped tiger. After that hell was let loose and I hope I never hear such an uproar in my life again. Shouts, screams and shots rang through the air and seemed to keep on for hours.

We reached the limits of the plateau just before dawn and climbed a few hundred feet before giving in completely. Joan was absolutely dead beat and I realised that I had but paid to an already dicky leg.

We could not have chosen a better place and daylight found us bedded down beside a little stream that meandered down the mountain and joined a pool near the level piece of ground where we had stopped. It was possible to see the whole of the plateau spread out beneath us and I raked it with my glasses while Joan bathed my leg with water from the stream and made a cold compress out of my shirt.

One could hazard a guess at what that night of horror must have been like for those below; I could make out four tigers wandering about and noticed two men with rifles on the roof of one of the gold sheds. The village appeared to be deserted and

another tiger emerged out of a house to wander down the main street.

There was no sign of life round the bungalow and I wondered if Carlos and Barbara had shut the place up in time. It seemed likely that they had as the drum had given ample warning.

I had a few scraps of food left and as it was not worth saving we made a meal of it and wondered when we would see our next. Joan left me after that to wash her hands in the stream and I was watching her idly when I saw a tell-tale yellow streak in the bushes above and shouted a warning as I fired. It was a tiger all right and the brute fell straight into our pool with a tremendous splash, drenching Joan in spray. Poor old Brag had been too exhausted to notice it and we both wondered if he would live through the day. A dog of his build is not intended for mountaineering and he had travelled many hundreds of miles during the last week or two. The climb up those steps must have been the last straw and even my shot failed to bring him to his feet. Joan was so upset that she completely forgot her recent fright.

We placed him in the shade and used my hat to sprinkle water over him, which gave him some relief.

Altogether it was a most depressing morning and although I had succeeded in getting Joan out of Carlos' clutches we were not in much better plight now. She must have read my thoughts and did her best to comfort me, bless her.

"Listen, John," she whispered. "I may have been through hell but I can honestly say that I have never known such happiness in my life and there is only one thing I want you to promise me.

This time it was I who read her thoughts and I made a promise as I pulled her tawny head down to my lips.

“Darling, Darling, it’s a tonic just to have you in my arms and I’m damned if I’ll let it come to that.”

A shot rang out below followed by another and I picked up the glasses to see what was up. I could make out four horsemen moving off from the direction of the bungalow; they had killed a tiger and Carlos was obviously very much alive. There was no mistaking him as he had one arm in a sling and was directing the activities of the other three who carried rifles.

I watched the little procession for nearly two hours during which time another six of our terrible allies paid the price. They had a certain amount of trouble in the village and one gathered that a tiger must have baled up in a house as there was an absolute fusillade of shots. Most of the occupants appeared to have achieved a fair measure of safety in their huts but almost without exception these turned out to be women and children. I guessed that every available man must have been out with Carlos on the look-out for me, and the remainder would be guarding the road from the ford. I felt considerably better for the thought and would have given much to have seen his picked men being taken in the rear while they were laying up for me on the trail.

Having cleared up the village, Carlos led his men over to the gold sheds which were the only civilised structures on the plateau, with the exception of his bungalow. Yet another tiger was despatched and the two men up on the roof were released. I expected trouble for ourselves after this and grabbed my own rifle but my alarm was not justified and the four mounted men made off in the direction of the bungalow.

It was odd that Carlos had not instituted a search for us and it seemed possible that he thought we had got away down the hill. Every hour brought more hope and Travers should be well on the way by now even if he had not actually reached the ford. We would anyhow have to move as the dead tiger in the pond was not an

ideal companion at the best and would be most unpleasant after a few hours.

Joan had not left Brag's side for sometime and I heard her cry out to me that he was dying. We both bent over him and realised that the end could only be a matter of a few minutes as his breathing was now hardly perceptible.

"I can't bear it," she cried and I had hardly put my arm across her shoulders when we heard an evil laugh and found Carlos above us. He held a double-barrelled shot gun in his good hand with the butt against his thigh and there was nothing I could do about it.

"Very touching," he sneered. "You will now oblige me by moving down the hill." We rose to our feet and he made me go ahead with Joan behind me; even so I still had my pistol and would have taken a chance if he had been carrying a rifle. The shot gun was impossible to deal with as it was probably loaded, with buck shot and we wouldn't stand an earthly chance.

Our progress was slow as I could do little more than hobble and we had almost reached level ground when I heard a strangled scream from Carlos. At first I thought one of his own tigers had got him and sprang round to protect Joan. It was no tiger, but Brag! How that dying hound had followed us down the hill and yet summoned up sufficient strength to leap on Carlos, we shall never understand. It must have been a case of mind over matter and it was all over for both of them before I could scramble up the few yards that separated us.

I had to use the barrel of my gun to force his jaws open and we spent half an hour in raising a little cairn of stones over a very faithful servant. We abandoned Carlos where he lay but I removed the signet ring that adorned his fingers and flung it into the stream. 1846

CHAPTER XIX

THE death of Carlos was not likely to see the end of our troubles and as I was incapable of another climb we decided to make for the gold sheds. Carlos had ridden up to them with three horsemen and must have sent one of the two rescued men back on his own pony, which left another to be accounted for.

There were eight sheds each about fifty yards apart and at one end there was a small building that looked like an office. We walked towards it and reached its shelter without mishap. It was an office right enough and must have been built by my grandfather to contain the records of the gold that came in from the reef. Carlos had either used it himself, or had kept someone to tidy up the place as it was spotlessly clean. A wooden bowl of rice and a large earthenware pot of water did much to raise our spirits and we took it in turns to eat while one of us kept a lookout from the windows that adorned each wall. It would be a bad place to defend and I looked for something to dig with so that we could find shelter below the level of the walls if necessary. I could find nothing inside but Joan noticed some implements lying against the side of the next shed and I sallied out to collect one after dark.

I was picking out a thing that looked like a cross between a pick and a kodale* when a man walked round the corner of the building and nearly jumped out of his skin when he saw me. I let him go, which was

* Kodale—Indian spade.

foolish of me, and returned to the office with my trophy.

I told Joan to sleep while I dug into the floor and bored loopholes in the walls. I worked at this by the light of the moon until midnight and then knocked off for a few hours while she kept watch.

Daybreak found us still unmolested and we further improved our defences by piling furniture round the walls and throwing up more earth. I was particularly pleased with a pair of old-fashioned safes, which proved a useful addition to our fortifications. The food situation was not too bad, and if we conserved the water there was every chance of keeping body and soul together for several days.

We were not left in peace for long, and presently heard a search party exploring the sheds. I cured all undue curiosity with my first shot by plugging someone who poked his head round the corner of the next building. This caused them to scatter and soon bullets were coming through the walls from all points of the compass. We were safe enough as long as we did not become careless and I tried to give the impression that we had two rifles by moving rapidly round from loophole to loophole and firing from each in turn. Our opponents appeared to have six riflemen, excluding the man I had shot but they were obviously not used to dealing with anyone armed with their own weapons, and I hit two more in the course of the day.

After that they became extremely cautious and we had no more trouble until the afternoon; by then they had realised that we must have dug ourselves in and that it was no use bombarding the walls.

It was about five o'clock and I was wondering how we would manage at night when a bullet came through the wall high up and shattered the jar containing our water supply. Some bright spark had got onto the roof of the next shed and I shouted at Joan to take cover under

the near wall. This put a new complexion on things as it pinned us down to one side but they had a healthy respect for my Mannlicher by now and did not exploit their advantage.

Bullets continued to come in with monotonous regularity until dark and it looked as if the ancient building would eventually dissolve around us. I had brought Carlos' gun back with me and noted with satisfaction that it was loaded with buck shot. I decided to take a chance and climbed onto the roof of the office via one of the windows, before the moon got up.

I arrived up there unseen and gradually rose to my feet until I could overlook the opposite roof. There were two sportsmen up there but they spotted me too late and got both barrels for their pains. The range was too extreme to do much damage but they each stopped some lead and I think one of them broke something as he hit the ground. It gave us a peaceful night and Joan slept in my arms while I was keeping watch. She looked ridiculously young, and strangely happy, in the light of the moon which streamed through the open window. I had my back propped up against the wall and although my rifle lay within reach I would have been ill prepared to meet trouble had it come. I had promised to wake her at 12 o'clock but could not bring myself to do it as I had lost all desire to sleep myself and was well content to gaze down on one I loved above everything in this world. She woke of her own accord an hour or two later and was furious that I had let her sleep on.

"I've loved just watching you," I told her, "and anyhow; I cannot sleep tonight, I've a feeling that we will be safe enough."

"Dear John," she breathed and snuggled up against me like a kitten.

I have always held a theory that a moonlight night is more silent than a dark one and twice I thought I

heard a faint sound in the distance before I was sure of it.

"Listen, my sweet," I whispered into her ear and we both caught the faint crackle of rifle fire in the far distance. Our opponents had heard it too and started a general exodus from the sheds which I was pleased to notice.

The sounds grew louder and there was no doubt that Travers must be on the track and fighting his way up the pass. Lights started burning all over the plateau and the drum commenced to beat its warning note to call out any survivors who could still bear arms.

We moved outside the shed and stood together listening to the gradually increasing roar of battle. Presently fighting broke out in a fresh direction and I guessed that either Ramlakhan or Chowry Mukir had brought up a flank attack by our old game trail.

The fighting died down soon after that until only an occasional shot or cry broke through the stillness of the night.

"So you will live to be Mrs. Stanton after all?" I told Joan. She was all out, poor girl, and we slept under the stars until Ramlakhan found us shortly before dawn.

They had not expected to find us alive and we were soon in the midst of a roaring crowd of savages, who insisted on carrying us shoulder high most of the way to the house. Here we found Travers with half a dozen fellow planters occupying the verandah. We shook hands all round but our first thought was for Barbara, as the others had only just arrived and had not seen her. I explored the place with Joan and we found her in that grim drawing-room. She had been shot through the heart and lay with an enigmatic smile on her face. Death had done nothing to mar her beauty and whatever the world might have thought of her behaviour, she was at least a very brave and gallant woman.

CHAPTER XX

I HAVE told you the story of the Golcooda hills exactly as it befell but I feel that there is still much in need of further explanation and I have added this last chapter for that reason.

Bill Travers had received my note and decided to act on it as soon as he could raise a search party. He had realised, as I had that it would be far too late if he attempted to persuade the Government to move in the matter and had got together six of his pals to make up the expedition. From what I had told them, they realised that horses were an obvious necessity and they also took bullock carts with them.

They met the first snag in Pindu village where every single follower deserted them on the spot; this meant that they would have to continue the trip without servants and must abandon all their tents and kit.

Carlos had obviously suspected a follow-up party of some sort and sent word to his agents in Pindu that they must be stopped at any cost. Their horses gave them complete immunity from Golcooda tigers but they were sniped most of the way and lost two horses from poisoned arrows. They were lucky not to have casualties amongst themselves and it took them nearly four days to reach the ford.

I had been gone two days when they arrived and as nothing would be achieved by waiting they decided to attack in force up the main track while Ramlakhan took a smaller party round by the game trail with orders to chip in if the main body reached the top.

They had met with desperate resistance and had to contest almost every yard of the way, suffering heavy casualties. The mountain men had fought like cornered rats and died to a man, no prisoners were taken. This was partly due to the regrettable custom in these parts of polishing off the wounded but I think their action was justified to some extent and they deserve great credit for sticking to the letter of the law and refraining from the use of poisoned weapons. The mountain men had made a last desperate stand at the entrance to the plateau, but Ramlakhan's flank attack had broken their spirit, and all organised resistance soon ceased.

A certain amount of spasmodic sniping went on and they only reached the bungalow a few minutes before us. We were all famished and a last touch of drama was added to the scene when Ramlakhan caught Carlos' old servant pouring enough arsenic into our food to poison an army. He apparently accepted his discovery in the act with resignation and promptly swallowed most of what he had prepared. I cannot believe that Ramlakhan made any serious attempt to stop him and it certainly removed one more problem from the many that confronted us.

I may seem very callous in my references to deaths, particularly the killing off of prisoners, but you must remember that the mountain men were definitely amoral. They had been brought up to a code of murder, and mere defeat would not have altered their outlook on life, a fact that the villagers realised only too well. In any case we were quite powerless to prevent it.

There was still much to be done outside and we agreed to hold a council of war in the evening while Travers got the place organised and put a guard on the gold.

Joan and I slept until late in the afternoon when the others returned, and we buried Barbara Eve in sight of the house that had been her home for so long.

Ranjit had come up the hill on a litter and we held our council out in the open. There were nine of us Europeans, also Chowry Mukir, Ranjit and Ramlakhan who sat down that evening to decide the fate of Golcooda. The main problem was the gold, which Travers had inspected and he estimated that it ran into several million pounds. If it had not been for this vast fortune, which might have caused heaven knows what evil, we could have departed and left the area to develop itself in peace. This was obviously out of the question and we decided to guard the stuff for the present and send word to the authorities that we had stumbled on a fortune and would they deal with the matter.

Chowry Mukir hated the idea of having the place over-run by civilisation but he could have set his mind at rest as the reef had been played out years ago and no more gold was ever found. We agreed to send four of the planters back with a guard while the rest of us remained to clear up all signs of strife.

They started on their return trip next morning and we expected them back in ten days, but it was nearly a month before they arrived. We explained to Chowry Mukir that the Government frowned on private wars however laudable their object and he kept all his people on the job of removing evidence.

We buried everyone and completely demolished the Zoo and the village. I suppose a few of the mountain men must have escaped but for all practical purposes they were eliminated. The women presented a further problem but as most of them had been captured at some period of their lives they were glad enough to go back to their own people. We did not see anything of Lalbahadur's wife and children and they must have escaped as their bodies were never found. I suppose in this land I still have blood relations I could well do without and hope that it will never be my fate to meet any of them again. The rain, which fell in torrents, greatly assisted our task and by the time the official

party arrived we had concocted an almost fool-proof story. Briefly it was this:—

The girls had stumbled on the plateau after their camp followers had been stampeded by tigers. Ram-lakhan alone had stuck to them and they had lived in the deserted bungalow until I had found them and been joined by Travers' 'shooting party'. We put Barbara Eve's death down to typhoid and no one questioned us any further.

There was no reason why they should and if any one talks out of turn later on he is unlikely to find a credulous audience.

Joan and I were married as soon as we reached civilisation and spent a long honeymoon on my estate. There were many formalities to be settled over the law of treasure trove and as neither of us needed the money we handed our share over to Travers with instructions that it was to be used for the betterment of Golcooda.

We tried to disturb the lives of Chowry Mukir's people as little as possible and once it was realised that no more gold existed they were left very much to themselves again. The discovery of the gold caused an enormous amount of speculation and most people believed that it had been discovered by my grand father, who had died without disclosing its whereabouts.

The Golcooda tigers were gradually killed off and excited the interest of almost every natural history society in the world. I do not know what their final verdict was but if any of them read this story they will have to revise their various opinions considerably as they were all far short of the mark.

After we came down from the mountain there still remained a very evil element to be cleared up in Pindu village. It is true that the 'mountain men' were bad enough but they had at least possessed courage, whereas

Pindu contained the agents and spies who maintained contact with the outside world and sent in word of the approach of anyone who entered the area. Gun-running was another side line they were engaged in and although Carlos must have obtained many of his weapons from sportsmen who came to grief, we found evidence that he was preparing to build up a much stronger force. There was a huge store of rifles in his armoury and he obviously intended to equip many more of his followers with these weapons, which now repose at the bottom of the river.

This necessarily destroyed much of our evidence against his agents but most of them bolted when they heard that the gold had been taken over by the Government and the police dealt faithfully with any that remained.

Joan and I left for the States that winter and it was a very sad parting with Ranjit who, I am afraid, will not live to see us again. Ramlakhan returned to his village to look after the old man but we shall see more of him ; there are some ties that nothing will break.

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